Manifesta, Art, Society and Politics

Creating a New Europe through Contemporary Art

Erdem Çolak

Manifesta, Art, Society and Politics

Manifesta, Art, Society and Politics

Creating a New Europe through Contemporary Art

Erdem Çolak

BLOOMSBURY VISUAL ARTS
LONDON • NEW YORK • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY VISUAL ARTS
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY VISUAL ARTS and the Diana logo are trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain 2024

Cover design: Annabel Hewitson
Cover image: Šejla Kamerić, *EU/others*, 2000. Two double-sided light box signs, 35 x 150 x 30 cm each. Installation view at Tromostovje (The Triple Bridge), Ljubiljana, Slovenia, 2000. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Tanja Wagner, Berlin

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Çolak, Erdem, 1989– author.
Title: Manifesta, art, society and politics : creating a new Europe through contemporary art / Erdem Çolak.
Other titles: Creating a new Europe through contemporary art Description: London : Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2024. | Revision of the author's thesis (doctoral)–University of Amsterdam, 2021, under the title: Creating a new Europe through contemporary art : Manifesta and its relation to art, society and politics. |
Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2023036822 (print) | LCCN 2023036823 (ebook) |
ISBN 9781350375802 (hardback) | ISBN 9781350375840 (paperback) |
ISBN 9781350375819 (pdf) | ISBN 9781350375826 (epub) | ISBN 9781350375833
Subjects: LCSH: Manifesta. | Art and society–Europe–History–20th century. |
Art and society–Europe–History–21st century. |
Art–Political aspects–Europe–History–20th century. |
Art–Political aspects–Europe–History–21st century.
Classification: LCC N72.S6 C583 2024 (print) | LCC N72.S6 (ebook) |
DDC 701/.03–dc23/eng/20230828
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2023036822
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2023036823

ISBN: HB: 978-1-3503-7580-2
ePDF: 978-1-3503-7581-9
eBook: 978-1-3503-7582-6

Typeset by Newgen KnowledgeWorks Pvt. Ltd., Chennai, India

To find out more about our authors and books visit www.bloomsbury.com and sign up for our newsletters.

CONTENTS

FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Like all long-running projects, this book, based on my PhD thesis, was written, thanks to the contributions and support of so many invaluable people. First of all, I am extremely grateful to my supervisors Christa-Maria Lerm-Hayes and Chiara de Cesari, who supported me at every stage of this research and enriched it with their criticism and suggestions. It was a great pleasure and honour to work with them. Their contributions to this process have been very stimulating, not only for improving my research but also for learning how to establish good relationships with my students-to-be. I would also like to thank Johan Hartle, the previous co-supervisor of this project, who was the driving force behind the transformation of the thesis from an idea to a proper PhD project. I would like to express my gratitude to Luiza Bialasiewicz, Anthony Gardner, Monica Sassatelli, Margriet Schavemaker and Emilie Sitzia, who accepted to be members of my doctorate committee and evaluated my thesis thoroughly. I would also like to thank the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA) and its Managing Director Eloe Kingma and the Republic of Turkey Ministry of National Education, with a special mention to Recep Demir, for their institutional and financial support for this project. I am grateful to Hedwig Fijen (Director of Manifesta), Francesca Verga (General Coordinator of Manifesta 12) and Manifesta Headquarter officers Emilia van Lynden, Jeroen de Smalen, Max Bouwhuis and Rubin Popova.

I would like to acknowledge Peyman Amiri, Aga Wielocha, Nour Munawar, Nermin El-Sherif, Nesli Gül, Fani Konstantinidou, Sarah Randeraad, Sumihiro Oki, Bo Wang, Charley Ladee, Fan Yang, Özge Baykan Calafato, Beste İşleyen, Ahmet Demirkıran, Mariana Lanari, Lora Sarıaslan, Suat Öğüt, Claudia Röck, Karin Christof, Machteld Löwensteijn, Tamara van den Berg, Aylin Kuryel, Deniz Buga, Zoénie Liwen Deng, Çağla Çınar, Miray Balat, Jolien Blokker, Gretha Postma, Han Blokker, Lizzie Blokker, Teun Bakker, Magda Zimmerman and Janneke Hoogstraaten who both supported my academic journey and enriched my Amsterdam experience. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the Bloomsbury editors Ross Fraser-Smith and Alexander Highfield, with whom I had the pleasure of working throughout the book's development.

Many of my close friends have been voluntarily suffering from my academic, artistic and personal troubles for many years. I do not know how to thank Selen Yamak for her years of comradeliness. She has a hand in

every beautiful thing I have done in my life, including the emergence of this thesis. *Muchas gracias!* Likewise, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Erdinc Habip, Cemal Salman, Mehmet Zan, Sema Bakır, Nisan Alıcı, Kadir Dede, Güzin Dede, Esin Hamdi Dinçer, Hasan Sivri, Yasin Durak, Kader Genç, Mehmet Mutlu, Esin Gülsen, Dilege Gülmez, Sıla Demirörs, Cansu Tekin, Onur Usta and Barış Acar whose love and support I have always felt by my side.

This whole process would not have been possible without the full support of my family. I owe more than a thank you to my mother Emsel Çolak, my father Ali Çolak, my brother Canberk Çolak, my sister Çiğdem Çolak Kalaycı, my brother-in-law İlker Kalaycı and the new member of our family, my sweet niece Beste Kalaycı. And finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my beloved Ekin Emek Berber, whose great love and labor made the book you hold in your hands a reality.

ABBREVIATIONS

M1 – Manifesta 1 – Rotterdam (1996)
M2 – Manifesta 2 – Luxembourg (1998)
M3 – Manifesta 3 – Ljubljana (2000)
M4 – Manifesta 4 – Frankfurt (2002)
M5 – Manifesta 5 – San Sebastian (2004)
M6 – Manifesta 6 – Nicosia (2006) – Cancelled
M7 – Manifesta 7 – Trentino – South Tyrol (2008)
M8 – Manifesta 8 – Murcia (2010)
M9 – Manifesta 9 – Genk (2012)
M10 – Manifesta 10 – St Petersburg (2014)
M11 – Manifesta 11 – Zurich (2016)
M12 – Manifesta 12 – Palermo (2018)
M13 – Manifesta 13 – Marseille (2020)
M14 – Manifesta 14 – Kosovo (2022)

Introduction

This study aims to develop a comprehensive and critical analysis of Manifesta – European Biennial of Contemporary Art by taking into account the historical, political, economic, urban and artistic conditions of its host cities and regions as well as post–Cold War Europe. I argue that Manifesta changes its perspective, discourse and structure depending on the city/region it operates in, even though trends across the decades can be identified. I have explored common ideas, themes and practices across its three decades and analysed them in the sociopolitical context of Europe. To understand the nomadic and interdisciplinary characteristics of Manifesta, I have evaluated the common discourses and practices of Manifesta editions, classified them in each part and employed diverse theoretical approaches and concept sets that enable me to discuss these discourses and practices critically.

Manifesta is an engrossing issue because of its many unique features: it defines itself as a European biennial, marking the transformations brought about by a crucial political moment, the fall of the Iron Curtain, as its starting point; it organizes each edition in a different city; it is supported by both private and public funds; its institutional structure and aims have evolved; it establishes relations with the political authorities of each host city in which it takes place and it forms curatorial teams. These and many other issues provide very rich research material, to understand not only the trajectory and artistic preferences of an art biennial from an art historical and curatorial perspective but also its role and function within the policy environment, dominant societal discourse and urban transformation of post–Cold War Europe at the time. Therefore, I chose to conduct interdisciplinary research and employed various approaches and discussions of diverse disciplines such as political science, European studies, urban studies, art history and museum/curatorial studies.

When I consider Manifesta as a whole, I argue that it is one of the new institutions of neoliberal governance, which has gained currency after the collapse of the bipolar (capitalist–communist) world, in the field of art. Although Manifesta might not have aimed to shape its discourse, financial

structure or institutional outlook chimed with neoliberal governance strategies at the time of its initiation in the 1990s, it has started to function within the neoliberal agenda of host cities or regions since the 2000s. When Manifesta showed an interest in post-communist countries, it developed a discourse that frequently emphasized concepts such as democracy, network, open-endedness and flexibility. However, by the fourth edition held in Frankfurt (2002), the emphasis on 'democracy' had disappeared, and instead the concept of 'the urban' had achieved currency. This ever-developing interdependent relationship between Manifesta as a nomadic biennial and host cities and regions allows us to better understand the contemporary neoliberal cultural policies that see culture and art primarily as a source of tourist attraction.

At the outset, I would here like to explain my perspective on examining contemporary art biennials, which has been shaped by my academic background in political science and my experience in the art world as an artist. I approach them as places where different actors meet and sometimes clash, including the organizing institution and its staff, curators, participant and local artists, sponsors, city administrators, collaborative institutions, art dealers, gallerists, critics and international and local audiences. These encounters, if not challenged by audiences or artists, or more rarely by curators, are often only evaluated from the framework of the organizing institution's official rhetoric. This prevents us from understanding what kinds of relationships these sites of encounters produce. In other words, biennials' official rhetoric maintains their discursive superiority over their events, unless critics and researchers critically tackle them over time. Therefore, the functions, preferences, opinions, interventions or expectations of these actors, who come across each other at biennials, are often underestimated.

Although there are more than 200 biennials active today,[1] there are a very limited number of studies that comprehensively evaluate different dimensions of one single biennial by comparing all editions of it: how this biennial is perceived by audiences, what sponsorship relationships it relies on, how it relates to the gentrification and neoliberal urban planning of the city where it is organized and what its political, artistic and curatorial choices are. This is what I endeavour to do with Manifesta in the chapters that follow.

Manifesta, too, lacks comprehensive research that unveils its institutional structure, political and artistic positions and transformation over time. The only monograph available is an edited book entitled *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe* (Vanderlinden and Filipovic 2005) commissioned by the International Foundation Manifesta (IFM), which includes critical articles derived from the comparison of Manifesta's first five editions. Therefore, while Manifesta, which realized its fourteenth edition in Pristina in 2022, has received different criticisms from artists, academics and art critics

regarding each edition, I attempt to study the characteristics of Manifesta as a cultural institution and biennial.

Since each Manifesta edition contains intertwined political, artistic, economic and sociological levels and each has to establish a completely different structure than previous editions, I questioned how to systematically research it. How could I evaluate, on a theoretical basis, forty-one curators and curatorial collectives, dozens of venues, sponsors, local administrators and Manifesta board members, hundreds of parallel events, more than 1,000 artists and the hundreds of thousands of audience members who participated in one of the fourteen editions of Manifesta held so far?[2] How could I, on the one hand, compile the voices of Manifesta officers, board members and curators to disambiguate Manifesta's official rhetoric, while on the other hand hear the other actors of the biennial, such as local administrators, local and participant artists, audiences, sponsors and so on? Would it be possible to conduct research that could be both considerably descriptive (since it attempts to sum up all editions of Manifesta) and critical at the same time?

I realized that to manoeuvre in this large terrain and distil meaningful outcomes, it was necessary to narrow the scope of the research and set its goals. I had to first look at how Manifesta defines itself and what goals it sets and then, by creating various analytical categories, identify what kind of a need Manifesta satisfies within post–Cold War Europe. The following section of this introduction describes the theoretical approaches and methodology I developed to comprehensively investigate Manifesta's three decades. Later, by referring to two fundamental texts, I briefly outline the official narrative of how Manifesta was initiated. This official narrative identifies the main thematic points of attention that are discussed throughout the research. In the final part of the introduction, I outline the plan for the remainder of the book.

Theoretical and methodological approaches

How should we critically investigate Manifesta? To understand a nomadic biennial that organizes each edition in a different context, it is necessary to create an interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological basis with the same flexibility and to evaluate the results of the analysis of each edition in different layers but with a holistic view. To put it differently, my approach is based on evaluating the new network established by Manifesta in each city or region by taking its domestic political, economic, urban and artistic layers into consideration. I discuss the outcomes comparatively to ascertain Manifesta's characteristic features. This approach enables me to reveal the basic transformations that Manifesta has undergone throughout its institutional history and to posit its position on the map of post–Cold War Europe as a cultural institution.

As a result of such comparative analysis of the editions and to mark the crossroads of Manifesta and follow the arguments of the research project more easily, I have divided the book into four analytical parts. Part I covers the period from 1991, when Manifesta emerged as an idea, to its third edition which took place in Ljubljana in 2000. Part II starts with the fourth edition held in Frankfurt in 2002 and comes to a close with the ninth edition held in Genk in 2012. Part III deals with the tenth (St Petersburg – 2014) and eleventh (Zurich – 2016) editions of Manifesta, where Manifesta saw its future in the non-European Union (EU) zone after the global systemic crisis and its effects on the cultural budgets of the EU countries. Finally, Part IV analyses the last three editions of the Manifesta, Palermo (2018), Marseille (2020) and Pristina (2022), connecting Manifesta's journey to the present.

Part I scrutinizes the initial motivations of Manifesta in its first decade, namely its aim to establish a network among artists living and working in post-communist countries and their counterparts in the West, its diverse institutional partnerships to realize this network and its curatorial and artistic strategies. I ask two fundamental questions when examining the 1990s, the period when Manifesta went from dream to reality: What function did Manifesta serve in a globalizing art world, and what exactly did Manifesta mean by 'the East' when it targeted post-communist countries? To answer these questions, I first focus on the theoretical discussions about the relationship between globalization and the art world and the increasing importance of biennials in this new configuration. I then analyse Manifesta's desire to reach the post-communist regions after the dissolution of the communist bloc and the reasons for its overemphasis on 'the East' in the light of orientalism discussions.

It is worth stressing that Manifesta's ambition to create a network among artists from post-communist countries and their Western counterparts was not an idea it developed by itself but with the help of some other institutions that paved the way for it. Among these institutions were the EU and its well-known project, the European Capital of Culture (ECoC), the Institute of New International Visual Arts (INIVA)[3] and the Soros Centers for Contemporary Art (SCCAs; Chapter 2). These institutions prepared the theoretical and practical basis for Manifesta's aim to contribute to the 'democratization process' of 'the East' in 'New Europe' that emerged after the Cold War.

A widely shared optimistic illusion, which Manifesta was also a party to, achieved currency in the field of art in post-1989: namely that two concepts, liberalism and democracy, always coexist. Actually, in political theory, the traditions of liberalism and democracy are in a tense relationship (Graham 1992). The collocation of these two concepts is not a must but is assumed to be due to 'contingent historical articulation' over time (Mouffe 2000). According to art historian Anthony Gardner (2015), who traces back how the concept of democracy has been transformed into a decisive and dominant myth in the relationship between art and politics since the late 1980s, loyalty to the concept of democracy and democratization processes emerged as a

denominator for both contemporary art critics (e.g. Bourriaud, Zask and Bishop) and critics of the post-political condition (e.g. Mouffe, Badiou, Rancière, Hardt and Negri) despite all the differences that their theories contain. Democracy became a 'master signifier' in the field of art and politics (and of course in the relationship between each other) and this created a paradox. The concept of democracy was not mentioned in the catalogue of the first edition of Manifesta, but was included in the second edition and turned into a primary reference point in the third edition – so there was a discursive shift 'from "Europe" to "democracy"' (Gardner 2015: 20–1). In the same vein, art historian Camiel van Winkel (2005: 220–1) stresses that the concept of democracy has often been used by Manifesta to mean 'open', 'inclusive' and 'open-ended', and therefore, 'Manifesta could indeed be seen as the manifestation of this new democratic ideal of openness or glasnost in the field of the arts'.

Although I agree with Gardner's and Van Winkel's analyses about Manifesta's emphasis on the concept of democracy in its official discourse, I argue that the emphasis on democracy has been replaced by Europe again in Manifesta's later editions, especially after it abandoned its mission to settle in post-communist countries. However, this time the notion of 'Europe' is separated from its former connotations and converged with the idea of 'Europe of the Regions'. As I analyse in Part II, the emphasis on the concept of democracy increased until an edition of Manifesta was organized in a post-communist country (Slovenia), and then the focus shifted to urban space, rather than democracy when Manifesta came back to 'fortress Europe' in its fourth (Frankfurt) and fifth (Donostia/San Sebastian) editions, which ushered in a new period.

In this new period, the concept of democracy fell out of favour, as Manifesta chose to relocate to EU member countries that were automatically assumed to be democratic. However, arguably Manifesta stayed loyal to the other favoured concepts of the first period such as 'open-endedness', 'flexibility' and 'network', which are fundamental elements of a neoliberal vocabulary. Therefore, the shift from political concepts such as 'democracy' and 'the idea of Europe' to geographical ones like 'regions of Europe' and 'the urban' made Manifesta complicit and embroiled with the neoliberalization processes of host cities and regions.

The crucial developments that marked this new period in Manifesta's history were as follows: Manifesta's interest shifted from an East–West axis to the North–South, from cities to regions and from creating experimental networks to institutionalizing and engaging with urban policies of the host cities and regions. In this decade, the establishment of Manifesta's headquarters in Amsterdam at the beginning of the 2000s and its effort to increase its brand value and prioritize its institutional continuity should be emphasized.

I argue that in the process that followed Manifesta's institutionalization and branding after its interest in 'the East' faded away, its approach

provided meaning and discourse in harmony with the neoliberal governance strategies of the regions it relocated to. Manifesta's shift in interest from cities to regions was directly linked to emerging new regionalist policies in Europe. Manifesta has been invited by different cities and regions as part of their neoliberal governance strategies. Per these policies, some cities in the regions have attempted to become tourist hubs by transforming themselves into attraction centres. During Part II, I investigate the editions of Manifesta in its second decade within the framework of theoretical discussions around new regionalism and creative cities. I also peruse Manifesta's interest in education, which started in its sixth edition in Nicosia and became permanent in its later editions, in the light of the discussions conceptualized in art theory as the educational turn.

Here, I use the term 'neoliberal governance' to refer to the neoliberalization of the state and its policies by way of public sector reforms ongoing since the late 1970s, and the widespread use of a management approach based on the cooperation of different power groups as a result of the disaggregation of the central activity of the state (see Hood 1990; Rhodes 1997; Evans, Richmond and Shields 2005). As cultural theorist George Yúdice (2003) has put it, various political, social and economic actors have started to see culture as an expedient means in the era of globalization. Accordingly, many cities and regions have implemented a more 'efficient', 'flexible', 'collaborative' and 'participative' urban management approach – in line with the neoliberal perspective (see Harvey 2005; Jones 2012; Pinson and Morel Journel 2016), which is based on the principle of private-public partnership (Jessop 1997; Harvey 1989). Moreover, they have adapted the scope of this urban entrepreneurialism to the cultural and artistic fields through the creative cities approach (Peck 2005; Gibson and Klocker 2005).

Although each city or region experiences different forms of neoliberalization adapted to its local context (Peck and Tickell 2002), I suggest that 'the post-political consensus' becomes the main characteristic of Manifesta due to the reciprocal dependence and mutual interest between Manifesta and bidder cities. The terms 'post-political' (see Rancière 2004a, 2006, 2010; Mouffe 1993, 2000, 2005; Žižek 2009; Wilson and Swyngedouw 2015) and 'post-democracy' (Crouch 2004; Rancière 2004b refer to consensus-based, post-ideological and neoliberal policymaking of the post-1989 era. Yet, the neoliberal consensus of this era has been harshly criticized by many intellectuals. According to Rancière (2010: 79–80),

> Consensus consists in the attempt to dismiss politics by expelling surplus subjects and replacing them with real partners, social and identity groups and so on. The result is that conflicts are turned into problems to be resolved by learned expertise and the negotiated adjustment of interests. … The aim of consensual practice is to produce an identity between law and fact, such that the former becomes identical with the natural life of society. In other words, consensus consists in the reduction of democracy

> to the way of life or *ethos* of a society – the dwelling and lifestyle of a specific group. (emphasis in original)

Manifesta's relationship with host cities and regions is also based on consensual practices. Following the diverse transitional periods experienced by cities and regions at their administrative level (be it from communist city to capitalist city, from post-industrial city to creative city or from non-EU city to EU city), Manifesta contributes to the cultural revitalization as well as the promotion of the cities and regions' new look through the cultural tourism it creates.

This mutual relationship has substantially shaped Manifesta's structure and perspective. Ultimately, Manifesta is a project that expands by the cities' bid, and its continuity is dependent on the economic and cultural impacts it provides to the cities rather than the works it displays within the scope of the exhibition. In addition, its financial system is based on a complex array of cross-scale public and private partnerships, involving actors from the local to the EU levels. As I show in Chapter 4, in many cases, public funds that are invested to organize Manifesta are allocated from the diverse EU funds transferred to cities and regions to stimulate socioeconomic development. This connection makes Manifesta's relation to neoliberal governance strategies even more visible.

Part III covers Manifesta's tenth edition held in St Petersburg (2014), where Manifesta reoriented its direction towards 'the East', and the Zurich (2016) editions. Starting from these editions, I argue, discourses and practices from the first or second decade of Manifesta have been eclectically re-articulated. Due to the absence of a common discourse and practice of the editions discussed in this part, I tackled both editions as separate chapters. Therefore, the theoretical debates in the editions that constitute Part III have been shaped according to the network of relationships that each edition has established in the local context, due to the fact that these editions and their eclectic discursive and practical structures do not form a meaningful whole. For example, while Manifesta was being hosted in St Petersburg within the framework of the State Hermitage Museum's strategies, and not those of the city's administrators, it was invited to Zurich as a result of the cities' regionalist policies. Likewise, it is difficult to evaluate together the role of the oligarchs in the Russian contemporary art scene which paved the way for Manifesta 10, and Manifesta 11 in Zurich, which problematized 'What People Do for Money'.

Part IV develops a critical approach to the last three editions of Manifesta, which took place in the ancient Mediterranean cities of Palermo (2018) and Marseille (2020), and in Pristina (2022), the capital of Kosovo, the youngest nation state in Europe. While all three editions have idiosyncratic characteristics, some important conceptual frameworks and practices connect them to each other and the editions discussed in Part II. The first of these commonalities is that Manifesta has once again made the issue

of the urban an integral component of the biennial. In all three editions, Manifesta commissioned a predetermined architectural office to take an X-ray of the city as a preliminary study for the biennial, and in this way, Manifesta wanted to counter criticism that it had not been able to establish a permanent presence in its host cities for many years. However, Manifesta does not realize that the very issues of urban regeneration and city branding make it part of the neoliberal urban transformation agenda.

In all four parts, I unveil the sociopolitics of Manifesta's curatorial and artistic strategies as they play out in the different editions and compare them with the biennial's official rhetoric. To evaluate Manifesta's official discourse about its curatorial and artistic choices, I prepared data sets consisting of diverse information about participant artists and curators that I compiled from Manifesta's catalogues and website. In each part, I provide data on the ages of artists and curators according to the years they participated in Manifesta, the representation of local participant artists and the nationalities of the participating artists. I also calculated the percentage of artists living in post-communist countries in its first decade to evaluate the discourse of Manifesta about making room for Eastern European artists.

Based on the data I analyse in Chapters 3, 6, 7, 8 and 9, I argue that, except for the Pristina edition, Manifesta has never given much space to local artists within its main programme. Moreover, its initial claim to represent young artists shows a falling tendency after the Ljubljana edition (2000). Another striking finding is that, again except for the Pristina edition, even in its first period, where connecting 'Western' and 'Eastern' artists was of prime importance, the proportion of artists from post-communist countries reached 35 per cent at most.

Before I begin to examine the official narrative about the beginning of Manifesta, I would like to mention a few points that have altered the course of my research. At the beginning of the research, besides examining Manifesta's catalogues, academic articles and art reviews written about different editions of the biennial, I planned to conduct field research in Palermo and do archival research at IFM in Amsterdam. Since its establishment, Manifesta has highlighted the importance of research, record-keeping and corporate transparency. Unfortunately, multiple attempts to receive permission for archival research were postponed or ignored by IFM. Although my request for archival research was never officially rejected, and on a few occasions I was welcomed in the office and promised support, I was never allowed to access Manifesta's archive. This was justified on the grounds of the busy work pace of the institution, the absence of an employee who could assist me in the archive and/or the issue of confidentiality on some issues.[4] On one occasion I was taken to the attic of the building, where a part of the archive materials is stored. It consisted of messily deposited boxes: I could barely get into the space. I was told by a young employee that attempts to hire an archivist had failed, so the materials were still waiting to be categorized. Moreover, I learnt that these attic materials were only 30 per cent of the

whole archive. The rest is stored in professional storage somewhere in Amsterdam's docklands. As neither the attic nor the storage space have a professional archive available for researchers to consult, I was forced to abandon my ambition to do archival research and collected my data instead.[5]

Thus, one of the main deficiencies of this book is that due to the inaccessibility of Manifesta's archive, the proposals of the cities that had unsuccessfully bid to host Manifesta could not be included. For the same reason, I was not able to access the criteria of curators in the process of selecting artists or the details of the sponsorship agreements. In the coming years, I hope these deficiencies will be overcome with new studies when Manifesta's archive is opened to researchers.

In the following pages, I study Manifesta's established narrative on the sociopolitical conditions that sparked its establishment, as well as its primary aims and its novel approaches, which provide a basis for further investigation.

The birth of Manifesta

One of the most important official sources that narrate Manifesta's journey from its birth to maturity is the interview by René Block, Hedwig Fijen, Henry Meyric Hughes and Katalin Néray in *The Manifesta Decade*, a book commissioned by the biennial to analyse Manifesta's impact in its first decade (Block et al. 2005: 189–200).[6] According to this text, which can also be seen as an official narration of the establishment of Manifesta, those who developed the idea for a new European art project for the first time were Gijs van Tuyl and Els Barents, who were working in the Netherlands Office for Fine Arts (Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst), which was linked to the Foreign Ministry of the Netherlands at the time. According to Henry Meyric Hughes, the thought behind initiating such an event after a series of discussions held in the Netherlands Office for Fine Arts between 1990 and 1991 was to 'take account of the political changes precipitated by the fall of the Berlin Wall, the gap created by the demise of the Paris Biennial after 1985, and the failure of other events, including "Aperto" (established in 1980 at the Venice Biennial) or Documenta, to take its place' (Block et al. 2005: 189). The structural changes that the Netherlands Office for Fine Arts underwent in 1993 and the termination of funding Dutch art outside the country due to new regulations appear to be two of the main factors that accelerated the organization of this new formation under the umbrella of an independent foundation. To fulfil this need, Stichting Europese Manifestatie Beeldend Kunstenaars (The Foundation European Art Manifestation or EAM) was founded at the national level in the summer of 1992 and it established an International Advisory Board in November 1993. Converting the name of this organization into Manifesta was the recommendation of René Block: 'It was obvious that the project needed a handier title than its initial working

titles. The simpler Manifesta seemed more appropriate. I admit that we nodded toward Documenta. We thought the title should be a demonstration and suggest the biennial's aims: to be young, dynamic, international' (Block et al. 2005: 192).

At the same time, it should be stressed that Manifesta's founders were in an organic relationship with Venice Biennale. Many key figures behind the creation of Manifesta were commissioners for national pavilions at Venice. Anthony Gardner (2015: 105) lists these names and pavilions that they were commissioning: Gijs van Tuyl and Els Barents (Netherlands), René Block (Germany), Svenrobert Lundquist (the Nordic countries) and Henry Meyric Hughes (Great Britain). After the inclusion of non-Western European curators as board members, this inclination of collaborating with Venice commissioners continued: 'Katalin Néray (commissioner for Hungary from 1986 to 1990, and director of Budapest's Ludwig Museum), Anda Rottenberg (commissioner for Poland between 1993 and 2001, and director of Zachęta National Gallery in Warsaw) and *Lilijana Stepančič* from Ljubljana's SCCA, the only initial board member who was not a pavilion commissioner' (Gardner 2015: 105).

Another important text entitled 'Manifesto of the Advisory Board of Manifesta – Why Another Biennial Called Manifesta?' (1996) and published in the catalogue of Manifesta 1 reveals the initial intentions of Manifesta's founders and carries important reference points that are tackled in the rest of the study. A part of this text puts Manifesta's position on Venice more explicitly: 'Wasn't the Venice Biennale the embodiment of success? The widespread discontent was dealt with ceremoniously and seemed to be balanced out by abundant public attendance, albeit mostly by professionals. Venice taught us how to turn a disadvantage into an advantage, but over the years it came to lack innovation' (Manifesto of the Advisory Board of Manifesta 1996: 16).

In the light of this information, Manifesta can be defined as an imagined artistic community that was initiated by a group of Venice commissioners in response to new political and artistic conditions after 1989. Here, I borrow Benedict Anderson's (1983) famous definition of a nation as an imagined political community. Against Venice's nation-based representation model, Manifesta attempted to transgress national borders and set a supranational network that embraced Western and Eastern European artists. In the words of art historian Nuit Banai (2013: 467), who discussed Manifesta's novel approach in the context of its relations with borders, nation states and the EU, 'At its apogee, this [Manifesta's] counter-model was linked to a confidence in the benefits of open markets, free flow of capital, and culture without the interference of borders.' Yet, as I argue throughout Part I, this flow was unidirectional, from the 'West' to the 'East'.

In the following pages, I take further quotes from the 'Manifesto of the Advisory Board of Manifesta' and comment on some parts of it. The first point that this text highlights is that the historical ground underpinning

Manifesta's existence was the end of the Cold War and the rapid transformations in the post-communist regions thereafter:

> The need for a new platform for artists was most keenly felt in 1989, after the fall of the Berlin wall. It wasn't hard to see then that there would be a new need for information, for open discussions, for new infrastructures and alternative exhibition spaces. It was, however, difficult to create something different on the context of large-scale international exhibitions. Things simply returned to normal too easily, and too quickly. The demise of the various *anciens régimes* was not the only motivation for talking a new direction. Concepts for exhibiting contemporary art in the west also seemed worn out; particularly the large-scale international bi- and triennials, always increasing in number, came under pressure. Hovering somewhere between the average art-fair and the sacro sanctum of the museum, the real problems posed by these shows kept being covered up by the bedazzling merry-go-round: memory is short when it comes to these exhibitions – after all, there's always a next time. (Manifesto of the Advisory Board of Manifesta 1996: 12–14)

This historical and political context connects Manifesta with other biennials initiated after political turbulence in the 1980s such as Gwangju, Johannesburg and Istanbul. Although each of these biennials had a specific relationship with the problematic history of the country in which it was initiated, the common point of all of them was to contribute to the reorganization of social and artistic spheres after painful political turmoil. In this context, such biennials can be considered either markers of a new page or tools for addressing and transcending the collective traumas that generated them.

So, what kind of relationship is there between the political transformations of former communist states after 1989 and an international art event called Manifesta? In Chapter 1, I try to analyse this point in the context of the *biennialization* of the art world since the 1990s, together with the geopolitical transformations at a macro level, and to position the artistic and political axis of Manifesta within this map. The political-artistic background of a Netherlands-based organization that discovers a 'new need for information, for open discussions, for new infrastructures and alternative exhibition spaces' (Manifesto of the Advisory Board of Manifesta 1996: 12) in the geography of Central and Eastern Europe can only be investigated by a comparative reading with the political and ideological transformation of the region and domestic components of the global art biennial economy.

Manifesta, like other contemporary art biennials, institutionalizes on the one hand and tries to find various solutions to avoid the static structure of classic institutions on the other: 'Manifesta is an institution built on the critique of institutions' (Van Winkel 2005: 219).[7] The above-mentioned quotation also sums up Manifesta's desire to differentiate itself both from

a 'sacred' museum space and the idea of an art fair where trade rules are dominant, since, according to Manifesta, the question of memory cannot adequately be addressed within these spaces. This description points to an intention shared by many biennials: to become a gathering space for diverse people. In this context, Manifesta aims to build relationships with cities and their memories and to keep doing this in a different city every two years (unlike many other stable biennials). This makes Manifesta a more interesting gauge than a static event would be of European identity-forging, and art policy shaping and changing within artistic discourse.

Yet, claiming to have such close cultural, historical, political and social connections with each host city leads to high expectations for Manifesta. Especially the expectation of having 'greater impact in the Eastern European countries than in the west' (Manifesto of the Advisory Board of Manifesta 1996: 20) initially paved the way for perceiving Manifesta as an 'Eastern European' biennial. So much so that, to change this perception, the curators of Manifesta 2 felt compelled to address this point:

> Of course, Manifesta should not be considered as an exclusively 'Eastern European' art event. The artists should not be judged according to geographical, national or regional criteria but should be treated and considered as equals taking part in a high-quality exhibition. Manifesta 2 should by no means be a diplomatic exhibition. (Fleck, Lind and Vanderlinden 1998)[8]

However, this perception of Manifesta would continue for a long time. Settling in only one post-communist country (Slovenia) in Europe in two decades would be the core of criticism, as longer or more frequent engagement with these geographies would have been required to re-examine the communist memory with a critical eye. In addition, as Manifesta became more powerful and recognizable as an institution, the collaboration between Advisory Board members with reputed museums to curate exhibitions and their recruitment by these museums,[9] as well as the rise in visibility of Manifesta artists at art fairs, approximated it to the working principles of art fairs and museums.

The text 'Manifesto of the Advisory Board of Manifesta' (1996: 17–21) continues with the innovations that Manifesta intends to offer the art world:

> *Why then yet another biennial called Manifesta?* First of all, we have no pretence of revolutionising the art world. The changes represented by Manifesta's organization may seem slight at first glance, but they aim to alter the general mentality over time. New in this formula is the team of five curators, who are together responsible for the exhibitions and the catalogue, and who even decide to make their decisions unanimously. Another novelty is the fact that the European countries that agreed to participate in Manifesta, and also to carry the artists' costs, did so without

> knowing which, if any, artists would be asked to exhibit. These two aspects help to clarify the often obscure relationship between economic forces and artistic freedom. … Although the end of the story of this first edition of Manifesta has not yet been written, we do already know that this approach had a greater impact in the eastern European countries than in the west. Nonetheless, the information gathered here will be evaluated and put to use at further venues. … It is our responsibility, therefore, not only to appoint the curatorial team and select future sites of Manifesta, but also to come up with a means of keeping the procedure open and flexible, and the organization as small as possible. (emphasis in original)

As emerges here, Manifesta is attempting to differentiate itself from other biennials by establishing a young curatorial team that consists of people who usually do not know each other – instead of a single curator model – to facilitate different curatorial approaches: As Hedwig Fijen has put, 'instead of creating a structure of consensus, we imagined that the possible confrontations that might emerge within the curatorial teams could be productive and in fact lead to new perspectives and working methodologies' (Block et al. 2005: 194). In this context, a total of forty-one curators and curatorial collectives were assigned for the first fourteen editions.[10] The initial aim of Manifesta was to hire young curators from various countries of origin. As I discuss later, this aim was not realized in each edition and became a target of serious criticism over time.

The second point that emerges from this quotation is the economic model of Manifesta and its evolution. The economic model that Manifesta offered was quite different from other art events of the period, namely: 'non-national representation based on a mutually shared financial construction in which all partner organizations were supposed to support Manifesta financially with a fee of five thousand Dutch guilders every two years' (Block et al. 2005: 192–3). The purpose of this approach was expressed as 'maintain[ing] the maximum independence from political, commercial and sectarian influences' (The Aims of Manifesta 1996). Pursuant to this model, Manifesta tried to construct itself as an independent institution and chose to ask for support from its different partner institutions (including national art councils), instead of asking national art councils to only support their participant artists. This model was in line with how Manifesta was positioning itself in supranational terms since the biennial had defined itself as a 'pan-European event' from the beginning. Over time it has been partially financed by the EU and EU member countries (Block et al. 2005: 193), although it has not transformed into a direct initiative of the EU. As I show later, though, the relationship between Manifesta and EU funds has been quite crucial in terms of the biennial's survival and development over time. The correspondence between Manifesta's non-national (city-focused and regional) approach and Europe's need to (re-)imagine itself after 1989 explains the current study's focus on this constellation.

However, this other-than-national model did not achieve much success. After the first edition in Rotterdam, the economic model shifted towards one where the investments of the host city became the main funding source of the biennial (Boutoux 2005: 207). One of the reasons for this failure was the fact that national art councils, as required by the national logic of their institutions, were committed to having a say in artist selection. In addition, since the budgets that the countries allocate to culture and art (especially contemporary art) show significant differences, the idea of asking for equal payment from all partner organizations met with difficulties.

Another reason was that sponsorship relations broke the spell of the independence of this model. For example, while one of Manifesta's initial goals was to represent artists of post-communist countries in a united European art scene, the main sponsor of the first two editions held in Rotterdam and Luxembourg was the world-leading tobacco company Philip Morris, who by then had already started to invest in post-communist countries to dominate the market (Chapter 2). The main sponsor of the tenth edition in St Petersburg was Novatek gas company, which is known for its proximity to Putin, and the main sponsor of the twelfth edition in Palermo was Sisal, which is Italy's largest gambling company. These choices prove that the economic relations of Manifesta are among the elements that require more detailed consideration as part of an overarching study of the biennial's contexts and meanings.

Outline of the chapters

Following the official discourse of Manifesta about its inauguration, in Part I, I focus on a few key issues to tackle the first decade of Manifesta from various aspects. In Chapter 1, I first discuss the transformation of art practices as well as art writing in the post-1989 era and its reflection on the proliferation of art biennials, also conceptualized as the biennialization of the art world. Then I move on to talk about the sources of Manifesta's special interest in 'the East' and what Manifesta meant by it. I devote Chapter 2 to shedding light on three crucial institutions that paved the way for and collaborated with Manifesta in its first decade: the EU through its cultural policies, SCCAs and InIVA. Although Manifesta's relationship with the SCCAs and InIVA was limited to its first decade, its relationship with the EU funds developed further in its second decade. Furthermore, this chapter examines the main sponsor of Manifesta 1 and Manifesta 2, which was the world's largest tobacco company Philip Morris, and its sponsorship tactics. Chapter 3 evaluates the artistic and curatorial strategies of Manifesta. Providing statistical data on the profiles of artists and curators, I discuss how the relational aesthetics approach affected Manifesta's choices in the first decade and what kind of transgressional art practices participants and local artists produced to challenge Manifesta's strategies.