

## Narrative “End States” and the Dynamics of Participation in Civic Crowdfunding

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The growing phenomenon of “paying to participate” is an important yet understudied aspect of crowdfunding, especially in the context of civic crowdfunding, where meaningful participation is linked to the production of public goods. In this study, we propose “end states” as a theoretical and methodological vehicle to examine how narratives of civic crowdfunding projects stimulate crowd participation and how this participation shapes the broader institutional and organizational context. We analyze narrative end states in two civic crowdfunding projects taking place in the Netherlands. The results of our analysis show three types of narrative end states: plotted, revised, and future. Initial end states were plotted to fulfill a specific need of the project initiators, however, these proved unsuccessful in mobilizing the crowd. Through an intense revision of end states, project initiators learned how to connect the crowd-community to the project, ultimately inspiring new end states for greater crowd-community participation in the future. We discuss the implications of our findings for research on narrative approaches to crowdfunding and the theory and practice of civic crowdfunding.

*Keywords: civic crowdfunding, narrative, end states, participation*

Researchers of crowdsourcing, crowdfunding, and other forms of crowd-enabled organization have found that online crowds make substantial contributions to the production and realization of innovations, cultural products, and public goods (Agarwal, Bennett, Johnson, & Walker, 2014; Brabham, 2008; Jeppesen & Lakhani, 2010; Malhotra & Majchrzak, 2014; Smith, 2015). The important question for these researchers is no longer whether crowds will play a role in transforming how entrepreneurs, organizations, and institutions create value, but rather, how this occurs and with what effect. In research on crowdfunding, this question has prompted scholars to examine the full range of potential benefits that crowdfunding may offer, beyond being a tool solely for funding. Research shows that “paying to participate,” in which contributors to crowdfunding projects pay to have a voice in shaping the project’s goals and to be part of a community responsible for realizing the project, may in fact be a theoretically new and unique feature of crowdfunding (Gleasure & Feller, 2016, p. 106).

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Questions regarding the nonfinancial benefits of crowdfunding are especially important for research on civic crowdfunding, in which the crowdfunded product is a community or public good (Davies, 2014). On the one hand, civic crowdfunding has been heralded as a potential mechanism to foster greater connection between governments and communities (Stiver, Barroca, Minocha, Richards, & Roberts, 2015). On the other hand, empirical studies suggest that crowd participation in civic crowdfunding may still be limited to a simple binary choice to fund or not to fund (Davies, 2014). To further examine how crowds participate in civic crowdfunding, we argue that additional research is needed that examines the interaction between project initiators and crowd participants in relation to the broader institutional and organizational context that shapes this interaction.

Accordingly, we propose the concept of "end states" as a theoretical and methodological vehicle to examine how narratives of crowdfunding projects trigger action and interaction in relation to a changing institutional and organizational context. We trace how the end states, or the beliefs and ideas about where the activity of project organizing should land (Lundin & Söderholm, 2013), change over time in civic crowdfunding projects in the Netherlands. Through in-depth interviews and an analysis of comments on crowdfunding platforms and project social media pages, we found that end states initially plotted by project initiators became disrupted upon commencing interaction with actors in the crowd. Project initiators then revised their initial end states several times to land on an end state that tapped into the actual needs of the crowd and connected these actors more meaningfully to the project. Going through the process of revising end states inspired future end states that exceeded the initial visions of the project initiators. We illustrate this narrative pattern of plotting, revising, and creating future end states through two cases.

Our analysis of changing end states has implications for both narrative approaches to crowdfunding as well as the theory and practice of civic crowdfunding. First, we extend research on narrative strategies of crowdfunding (Manning & Bejarano, 2017) by offering a more dynamic view of how *crowd response* (and lack thereof) shapes the narrative strategies of crowdfunding project initiators over time. Second, we contribute to the debate on the meaning of participation in civic crowdfunding (Davies, 2014; Stiver et al., 2015) by showing how crowd participation can entail influence on the organizations and institutions that play a role in facilitating these projects, beyond the narrow examination of how crowds shape the funding of a product or outcome. Finally, our research has implications for platforms dedicated to hosting civic crowdfunding projects. Our findings suggest that such platforms should afford means for prolonged reciprocal engagement between project initiators and the crowd-community.

This article is organized as follows. In the next section, we review and analyze research on participation in crowdfunding, and civic crowdfunding specifically. We next situate our narrative approach to crowdfunding and introduce the concept of end states. Following this, we describe our methods for analyzing narrative end states in our data and illustrate the pattern we discovered through analysis of two cases. We conclude with a discussion of implications for research on narrative approaches to crowdfunding and the theory and practice of civic crowdfunding.

### **Participation in Crowdfunding**

One of the important insights from recent research on crowdfunding is the meaning-centered nature of crowd participation. Beyond just providing funding for projects, research shows that crowds can play a pivotal role in shaping the creative process and products of the project initiators. In an analysis of crowdfunded video game development, Smith (2015) found that frequent interaction between the video game developers and actual or prospective project backers resulted in significant changes to the final video games produced. Smith concluded that the economic model of crowdfunding in video game development necessitates that developers of a given project "provide crowdfunding communities with deep, regular insight into the development process, while absorbing and responding to their feedback" (p. 199). Similarly, Morris (2013) analyzed the "co-creative" relationship between music artists and fans through social media and found that intimate bonds can develop wherein fans have a direct influence on the production process. Traditional roles transform as artists take on a new role of "cultural entrepreneur" while fans become "patrons." Even when involvement is just an "illusion of inclusion," it still results in passionate investment by patrons in music projects. "Digitization has revealed what has long been a central truth of cultural commodities: people are not paying solely for the objects; they are also paying for the meanings they associate with the object" (Morris, 2013, p. 287).

These studies exemplify the phenomenon of "paying to participate" (Gerber, Hui, & Kuo, 2012), which describes how backers of crowdfunding projects pay to shape a project's goals and to be part of a community responsible for realizing the project. For example, backers of a crowdfunding project often stay involved, even after funds have been secured, to participate in subsequent development activities. Gleasure and Feller (2016) argued that paying to participate is theoretically new and distinct compared with other crowd-based forms of organizing, such as crowdsourcing. Yet, to facilitate a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, research is needed to understand how paying to participate is organized in different types of crowdfunding projects (Gleasure & Feller, 2016). How project initiators engage a community of funders is especially salient in crowdfunding projects designed to produce public goods.

### ***Civic Crowdfunding***

Although definitions of civic crowdfunding are still evolving, the term describes crowdfunded projects that "provide services to communities" (Davies, 2014, p. 28). Notably, regardless of one's contribution to the crowdfunding campaign, members of a community can consume the goods produced equally. For example, civic crowdfunding might be used to develop public assets such as parks or artifacts for public museums. Civic crowdfunding projects can be initiated by members of a community or by organizations that provide public goods and services to a community. Because the geographically proximate community will benefit from and make use of the public good, backers of civic crowdfunding projects are often presumed to be local members of a community (Stiver et al., 2015).

The nascent research on civic crowdfunding has distinguished some important features of this type of crowdfunding (Davies, 2014; Stiver et al., 2015). One important feature is the potential of civic crowdfunding to facilitate networking and encourage collaboration between citizens and government. Because outputs are for public, and often repeated, use, "there is less potential for a sole point of

exchange (money for reward) and more encouragement toward longer term involvement in the project” (Stiver et al., 2015, p. 260). Further, civic crowdfunding is also known for blending offline and online community, because offline events often still play a central mobilizing role in these projects (Stiver et al., 2015). For these reasons, the nature of the crowd in civic crowdfunding is presumably rooted in concepts of community, ranging from actual local community involvement to involvement of virtual communities (Stiver et al., 2015), or even groups of online participants experiencing an “illusion of inclusion” (Morris, 2013, p. 283). We use the term *crowd-community* to capture this broadly conceived yet recognized role of community in civic crowdsourcing, a term that is especially relevant in light of the growing sentiment that participation in civic crowdfunding projects should aim to forge more active communities and civic engagement (Stiver et al., 2015).

We argue that paying to participate is likely to figure centrally in civic crowdfunding; however, scholars of civic crowdfunding have somewhat conflicting perspectives on this phenomenon. On the one hand, civic crowdfunding has been heralded as a potential mechanism to foster greater connection between governments and communities (Stiver et al., 2015), leading to important benefits for communities. On the other hand, empirical studies suggest that crowd participation in civic crowdfunding is often still limited to a simple binary choice to fund or not to fund (Davies, 2014). To further examine how crowds participate in civic crowdfunding, we argue that additional research is needed that examines the interaction between project initiators and crowd participants in relation to the broader institutional and organizational context that shapes this interaction. How is interaction between project initiators and members of the crowd-community shaped by changing institutional and organizational processes? To explore these questions further, we adopt a narrative approach, which we explain in detail in the following section.

### ***A Narrative Approach to Crowdfunding***

A narrative approach usefully shows how actors interpret what is meaningful in a given context, as actors make sense of and organize their experiences of the world through narrative (Weick, 2001). Beyond being just a device for individual sense making, narratives also construct spaces for action (Araujo & Easton, 2012) by mobilizing actors toward certain causes. Research on how narratives shape entrepreneurial projects shows that storytelling plays a central role in mobilizing resources and support for innovation projects (Bartel & Garud, 2009; Garud & Giuliani, 2013). By connecting past and present to a desired future, entrepreneurs are able to convey value through narratives that induce participation of potential funders. Manning and Bejarano (2017) used a narrative approach to examine how crowdfunding projects were framed and communicated to enact support from various audiences. These authors found that whereas some campaigns used what they called an “ongoing journey” style of narrative engagement, which had bolder visions and conveyed greater concern for the larger impact of the project, others used a “results-in-progress” (p. 194) style of engagement, which focused more on progressions of past accomplishments. Though neither style proved more successful than the other, the authors did find that failed projects were more likely to be associated with campaigns that did not show a clear narrative pattern, suggesting that how crowdfunding campaigns tell their story is important to mobilizing the crowd. Narratives are also important to link together events and connect projects to larger contexts and discourses (Gartner, 2007). Koçer (2015) examined how independent media producers in Turkey were able to create communities of support and build reputations of independence through narratives of their

crowdfunding projects. Crowdfunding discourses were found to accomplish social and political change (Torchin, 2006).

A narrative approach is useful for the aims of this study for several reasons. First, we are interested in understanding how actors in a civic crowdfunding project understand and define meaningful participation. As narratives help actors to make sense of their world, we can examine narratives for what actors consider to be meaningful. Second, we are interested in how project initiators interact with members of a crowd-community. Because narratives serve to trigger action, we can examine narratives for how these actors make appeals to members of the crowd-community to participate. Finally, we wish to examine how the broader institutional and organizational context shapes the process of participation in civic crowdfunding. As narratives usefully connect events to make a more coherent whole, we can examine narratives for what aspects of the broader context are relevant to participating actors. Specifically, we propose the concept of *end states* as a theoretical and methodological vehicle to examine how narratives of crowdfunding projects trigger action and interaction in relation to a changing institutional and organizational context.

### ***End States***

End states, simply put, describe the beliefs and ideas that actors express narratively about where the activity of a project should land when uncertainties make it impossible to design and follow a complete specified plan (Lundin & Söderholm, 2013). The concept comes from military peace-supporting operations (Skoglund, 2012). "The task [guiding the project] is there in the sense that there are ideas as to where the operations should lead in terms of peace and the concept used in this context is 'end state'" (Lundin & Söderholm, 2013, p. 591). Accordingly, rather than having concrete goals, end states suggests that actors operating in projects under uncertainty form fairly fluid ideas as to where the operations of a project should lead. End states can begin formation in narratives about a project far before the first project plan is ever laid and continue even after the last project task has been fulfilled, as ambitions, hopes, and dreams for the future continue to shape future project activity (Lundin & Söderholm, 2013). Further, a multitude of events may contribute to the formation of a particular end state, as new actors introduce fragments of new meaning and ideas, allowing them to participate in the formation of the end state regardless of their proximity to the project (Lundin & Söderholm, 2013). Changing end states, enacted through narratives, show how projects change over time in connection to the project's larger social surround. An analysis of changing end states in civic crowdfunding projects is particularly useful to shed light on how the crowd-community may influence a crowdfunding project and how the project may also be shaped by a broader institutional and organizational context. In the following sections, we describe the research context and methods used to investigate narrative end states in civic crowdfunding projects.

### **Research Context and Methods**

Our research takes place in the Netherlands, where cultural arts organizations have recently experienced major cuts to the subsidies formerly provided by the Dutch government (Raad voor Cultuur, 2012). These financial cuts spurred an influx of alternative financing models, one of which was crowdfunding, to make up for this deficit of support for both new and existing public arts projects.

Because the funds from these projects support the installation of art and other important artifacts for the public to enjoy, the primary type of crowdfunding employed was donation or reward-based, in which donors get nothing in exchange for their donation, or some small nonfinancial reward, such as a T-shirt or other token of appreciation (Mollick, 2014).

Our data for this study are based on cases of two civic crowdfunding projects that emerged in the Netherlands following the drastic subsidy cuts. We use a case study approach, which is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context” (Yin, 2014, p. 16). We chose these projects because they were able to gain funds by facilitating and sustaining substantive interactions with actors in the crowd-community, attracting rather large numbers of individual donors. Further, stories of these projects were circulated within the emerging crowdfunding community as exemplar projects. The first case comes from a project initiated by a large natural history museum called Nature,<sup>1</sup> which aimed to raise €5 million (US\$6.1 million) through crowdfunding in order to purchase a *Tyrannosaurus rex* skeleton to display in the museum. Though Nature did not manage to raise the funds entirely through this crowdfunding project, the project garnered so much public attention that larger donors contributed the remaining funds needed to acquire the T-Rex. The second case comes from a project initiated by a group of volunteers at a fine arts museum called Abby, which raised €30,000 (US\$37,147) through crowdfunding to purchase an important piece of art for the public collection.<sup>2</sup>

### **Data Collection**

We began our research by conducting in-depth interviews with the initiators and coordinators of these two crowdfunding projects. We conducted two in-depth interviews with the initiator and coordinator of the Nature museum crowdfunding project and four in-depth interviews with the initiators and coordinators of the Abby museum crowdfunding project. We employed a narrative style of interviewing, asking our interview participants to provide us with in-depth “accounts” of their projects, which are “storylike constructions, containing description, interpretation, emotion, and expectations” (Harvey, 1995, p. 3). We began by asking them for an account of their early vision and ideals for the project before it began. Next, we asked for more detailed accounts of how their initial vision for the project developed over time. Participants shared details on their interactions with the crowd-community, and notably, all participants explained that their initial vision for their projects changed significantly as they experienced more interaction with the crowd-community. We also asked participants for accounts of how they saw their projects continuing into the future. The advantages of in-depth narrative interviews were the details we gathered on how project initiators perceived end states changing over time.

After the interviews, we collected online data that documented these crowdfunding projects. Online data included the crowdfunding websites, including the video “pitch” of the project, which is

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<sup>1</sup> We have used pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of our interview participants.

<sup>2</sup> The Abby museum project used a Dutch crowdfunding platform that employed an “all-or-nothing” approach. Nature museum created their own platform to gather the funds online and did not use an “all-or-nothing” approach.

released directly when the project begins through an online platform. We then examined the online interaction in the comments of the crowdfunding platforms because participation in comment threads is considered a form of engagement on crowdfunding platforms (Gómez-Diago, 2015). Further, because social media has been identified as a key component to fostering involvement and collaboration in crowdfunding (Moissejev, 2013), we also examined comments on associated social media pages during and after the crowdfunding campaign. We were interested to know how crowd feedback, in the form of both online comments and offline interactions, shaped the end states of the project initiators, something that we had learned about during the interviews. This analysis of real-time online activity complemented the retrospective accounts provided by the in-depth interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

All interviews were conducted in English and were transcribed and analyzed, along with the online data, using a version of narrative analysis (Boje, 2001). We started by coding openly for end states in the narrative accounts we gathered. Initially we were looking for end states as the actors described them before the actual start of the project, given that narrative structure connects to the past (Boje, 2001). After identifying a set of initial end states for each project, which we call "plotted end states" in our analysis, we then traced how these changed over time. Here we found that plotted end states were revised multiple times as project initiators tried different ways to connect to potential donors in the crowd-community. After noticing several revisions to initial end states, what we call "revised end states" in the analysis, we then coded for the actors, events, and interpretive devices that influenced these revisions. Finally, we coded for how actors talked about end states for their projects in the future, which we call "future end states," given that narrative structures also commonly project visions of the future (Boje, 2001). In the next section, we present the results of our analysis of end states in the Nature museum and Abby museum cases.

### **Results**

Our analysis showed three types of narrative end states: 1) *plotted end states*, which were planned by project initiators before the project; 2) *revised end states*, which were created in online and offline interaction between project initiators and potential donors in the crowd-community; and, finally, 3) *future end states*, which were the project initiator's new dreams and hopes for the future after completing the crowdfunding projects.

We found that actors began by narratively plotting an initial end state, that is, connecting events to suggest a path for where the project should land (Czarniawska, 1997; Gabriel, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1988). Plotted end states justified the project's existence, at least initially. However, our analysis shows that once project initiators began reaching out to potential donors for support, continued legitimization of the project relied on project initiators changing their initial plotted end states. Through communication and interaction with the public—specifically in the exchange of provisional narratives between the crowd-community and the project initiators (Bartel & Garud, 2009), in the form of personal stories and exchanges of humor, both online and offline—project end states were revised to better meet the needs of the crowd-community. Finally, we also found that revised end states inspired project initiators toward new future end states. Notably, project initiators envisioned future end states that included a greater role for

public participation. See Table 1 for an overview of end states in two of our cases, which we present in the following sections in detail.

**Table 1. Overview of Changing Narrative End States.**

<b>Case</b>	<b>Plotted End States</b>	<b>Revised End States</b>	<b>Future End States</b>
<b>Nature</b>	Grow museum into an attraction	Gain funds from large donors ↓ Make emotional connection with children ↓ Sustain dialogue between crowd-community and museum	Become an open institution
<b>Abby</b>	Preserve the artwork in the museum	Gain funds from large donors ↓ Create publicity for the museum ↓ Make emotional connection between crowd-community and the art	Create community

### **Case 1: Nature Museum Brings Home the T-Rex**

When speaking with the project initiators about their reasons for raising €5 million (US\$6.1 million) to purchase a *Tyrannosaurus rex* skeleton, several important events came to light that occurred in the years preceding this project. For several years, the Nature museum had undergone extensive expansion through mergers with researchers of natural history and geology from nearby universities. What resulted from these mergers was an overflow of researchers and collections that were quite confined within the walls of the current building space; physically, the museum needed to expand to accommodate their new collections. At the same time, the ambition of the museum was growing. Rather than operate “business as usual,” the museum decided it was time to capitalize on their expansion to also change the strategic direction of the museum. Rather than being a place where collections were displayed for viewing, the museum sought to become an attraction, more like a theme park, that would draw in significantly more visitors annually. The following excerpt shows how project initiators plotted the project’s initial end state through the museum-as-attraction approach:



We would say we want to attract not only the visitors we already have, but we would also like to attract visitors that normally visit a zoo or an attraction park, but rarely visit a natural history museum. And then we said we should act more like an attraction park and add exhibits. So we came up with the new concept and what is the biggest attraction in our type of public institution? Well, that's the *Tyrannosaurus rex*. So we said, "Well, let's go for T-Rex, let's go for a dinosaurium hall." (Project Coordinator 1)

The initial end state for the project was to feed into the museum's long-term plan for expansion of visitors and growth through a special exhibit.

To fulfill this growth end state, building a new museum with a dinosaurium hall seemed the perfect solution. "So we decided let's build a new museum" (Project Coordinator 1). With the blueprints for the dinosaurium hall already under way, all Nature museum lacked was a T-Rex skeleton to fill the space. Nature paleontologists partnered with a U.S. organization to begin the search for the elusive *Tyrannosaurus rex*. "In the U.S. everyone had said, 'Well, you are silly, you can want a T-Rex but you can't have a T-Rex,' because in the last 20 years no real sufficiently complete skeleton has been found" (Project Coordinator 2). Remarkably, after several years and a failed dig, Nature paleontologists finally struck gold. "So we made the second [expedition] and we were extremely lucky. We dug one of the best T-Rexes ever found" (Project Coordinator 1).

However, finding the funds to purchase and transport the T-Rex home to the Netherlands proved more difficult than the museum coordinators had anticipated. The museum's growth ambition also happened to come at a time when public support of museums in the country was on the decline.

Our ambitions are bigger than our regular funding and we believe that's important. That's not only for this acquisition [of T-Rex], but it is also for the new museum. Our ambitions are bigger for the standard budget than is available. We needed to change as an organization. (Project Coordinator 2)

The museum needed €5 million to bring the T-Rex home, but there was only a very small budget to acquire natural history artifacts. "We put something aside for making the dinosaurium hall; obviously, we could take some of that but we still missed a few million. So then we said, 'Well, let's find a way of raising the funds'" (Project Coordinator 1).

However, attempts to spark the interest of large donors to support the project initially failed. Although the T-Rex is a well-known creature in some parts of the world, there was never before a T-Rex in the Netherlands. Potential donors were simply unaware of the T-Rex's value, something that was intrinsically obvious and taken for granted by the project coordinators. Even though the museum staff had carefully documented the entire journey of the dig in the United States and shared this through their website, this "developmental" approach (Manning & Bejarano, 2017) to showing how the project began and took shape over time did not mobilize large donor support. They tried many different approaches to capture donors attention, but to no avail.

We can tell stories about how rare it is, [donors are] not interested. We can tell stories that this is the only one outside of United States, [donors are] not interested. We can tell stories about how the Dutch travelled all over the world, going on the adventures, showing our adventurous spirit, [donors are] not interested. (Museum Coordinator 1)

Project coordinators decided instead to turn to the wider public for support through crowdfunding. A crowdfunding campaign called "teach for T-Rex" was created, targeting the emotional appeal of T-Rex for children. In this excerpt, a project initiator explains,

We found we could only get [funding] if a lot of children were really motivated and showing their fascination for T-Rex. So that's how we came up with the crowdfunding. But we travelled quite a distance to get to this essence. (Project Coordinator 1)

The campaign featured a blend of online and offline interactions with the public. Several events took place featuring full-scale replicas of the T-Rex, complete with adoring child fans looking on with fascination. Parents posted pictures of their children at these events to the museum's Facebook page. A funny advertising campaign was created that featured a friendly T-Rex asking for a donation. In a well-known media contest that was judged by children, the T-Rex ad won the top prize. A conversation on social media also began between museum coordinators and members of the crowd-community. They interacted to make a fun and likable character of the T-Rex. In the excerpt below, a humorous exchange is shared on Facebook between the museum project coordinators and the participating crowd-community. Project coordinators routinely offered fun pictures of the T-Rex, as seen below taking a "selfie." Figure 1 shows how the crowd responded with their own humorous content.



T-Rex "Selfie" (posted by project coordinator)

Crowd-Community Responses

**Figure 1. Social media exchange between project coordinator and crowd-community.**

Social media exchanges via comments and pictures gave the crowd-community an opportunity to build on the fun campaign created by the museum. A project coordinator explained how the popularity of the T-Rex in the crowd-community sparked them to see the importance of the public's connection to the artifact:

This T-Rex should be for every person in the Netherlands a way to get a connection that they are part of this success of finding it, a part of the process to get the T-Rex here. We want to share that because we find it important to get support from all over the Netherlands. And it is not only for the museum but for everyone who has interest in dinosaurs. (Project Coordinator 2)

Wealthier members of the crowd-community could even purchase one of the bones of the T-Rex to have their name inscribed onto it. The collective T-Rex was literally "co-owned," bone-by-bone, by hundreds of donors. Through interaction with the public, the museum coordinators revised their initial end state: It was not just about gaining the funds and promoting the museum's expansion; rather, the project became a vehicle for improving the long-term connection between the public and the museum. Even long after the crowdfunding project ended and the T-Rex was acquired, the crowd-community remained involved in activities, even being responsible for choosing the T-Rex's name. Further, many new donors in the crowd-community were attracted by the T-Rex crowdfunding campaign and wanted an ongoing relationship with the museum:

Because we learned that these donors, they are really enthusiastic about T-Rex, but for building a real sponsorship relationship they don't want to have it short-term. They want a more long-term relationship. They want to connect. And T-Rex might be a thing for that, but connecting to the institute as a whole and focusing on some subjects that we have in common, that's the most important thing. (Project Coordinator 2)

In fact, project coordinators continued crowdfunding even after they became aware that it would not generate enough money to buy the T-Rex. A project coordinator explained:

Most of the time you use crowd funding to get the money to get things going, but we ended up with a different approach. Our crowdfunding is not to earn money. It sounds strange, but our crowdfunding is cost neutral. What we spend is roughly what we get. (Project Coordinator 1)

Instead, the crowdfunding campaign turned into a relationship-building mechanism:

I think another aspect that we learned by doing [crowdfunding], it is also good to add relations to the institute; we get a lot of dialogue with people donating, so you get more involvement. So you can build loyalty with people, whereas most of the time with anybody who visits the museum, you do not get enough dialogue. (Project Coordinator 1)

The desire to sustain a connection with the public shaped a new future end state for the museum: to become a more open institution. Museum coordinators were making new programs to keep the open dialogue that the T-Rex crowdfunding campaign had sparked:

So what we are now adding in the museum is an educational program and a mobile application program which we will put online to feed the interest people get every day of the year. Students in school programs can visit nature with the mobile phone. (Project Coordinator 1)

With this new program, children upload and share their own images on the museum's website. A project coordinator explains how they now saw a larger mission to stay connected continually to the public and share their knowledge of biodiversity. "The museum is only a small part of it. Our objective as an institution is to enlarge the knowledge on biodiversity and to open up the collection to researchers and people all over the world" (Project Coordinator 2).

### ***Case 2: Abby Museum Volunteers Save the Wood Circle***

Project initiators described the Wood Circle as an impressive work of art, one that visitors and volunteers of the Abby museum found unforgettable. "There is something that triggers people, or at least triggers me. It was such a meaningful piece" (Project Volunteer 2). "Many of the visitors who do not understand conceptual art or land art, they get kind of enchanted when they meet this circle" (Project Volunteer 1). The hundreds of branches that composed the Wood Circle filled the floor of an entire room in the Abby museum. For many years, the Wood Circle was a formative part of the museum collection, on loan to the museum by the owner. However, when the original owner of the art passed away, the inheritor decided to put the artwork up for sale, a very disappointing surprise to the museum volunteers. A museum volunteer recalled, "I felt very sad about it because I loved this Wood Circle. I think it is an important part of the collection." Volunteers recognized that the absence of the art would leave a void in the museum.

I really felt connected to the piece because we so often talked about it. And yeah we were really stunned; "this cannot happen, this cannot be true." We thought this should not disappear. It was really emotional to quite some of us including me. I really thought, "You cannot get rid of this piece, you should not." (Project Volunteer 2)

For volunteers, the initial end state was to save this piece of art and preserve it for the museum.

However, for the Abby museum, funds at this time were limited. "In the last years, in the crisis, museums don't have any money to do extra things, extra projects or extra acquisitions" (Project Volunteer 3). The museum budget had no room to acquire this older piece of art. Initially volunteers assumed that reaching out to the "friends of the museum," the more regular donors, would be the key to saving the artwork. However, quite surprisingly, they were unresponsive to the volunteers' requests for the funds. "Because they [friends of the museum] have so much money I thought, 'This will be not a big problem for us to get at least 5 or 10,000 [euros].' But they didn't" (Project Volunteer 3).

The museum staff recognized a unique opportunity to rectify this unexpected situation and gain publicity for the museum. Rather than letting the owner sell the art, museum staff proposed a crowdfunding project to raise the funds. They initially focused on getting exposure for the project, which aligned with their larger goals to get publicity for the museum in general. They printed T-shirts and buttons around the theme "Save the Wood Circle." However, the volunteers of the museum were initially hesitant toward the museum staff's "transactional" approach (Manning & Bejarano, 2017) of exchanging rewards for donations.

I hesitated. I was not very much interested in this [crowdfunding] because it had so many rules. When people give, you should give them a present. I didn't like the idea of asking people to give something and saying, "Then you will have this for a present." I didn't like how this crowdfunding worked. (Volunteer 1)

Soon the museum staff learned that getting support through crowdfunding proved much more difficult than they had initially anticipated. "We just started with these logos and T-shirts and buttons and we thought, 'Well, if you just let people know via website, and in the museum, and in social media, it will go. It will run by itself and money will come'" (Project Staff Coordinator). However, the crowd-community did not immediately recognize the value of the artwork.

It was quite difficult because we would ask, "Would you like to help us to save this Wood Circle?" and people would go "Why? They are just branches." So, "Why would I buy this, why won't you go into the woods and just collect some branches yourself and put them on display?" . . . And then there was a moment when it was like, ok, things have to happen to get more people connected to this work. (Project Staff Coordinator)

A blend of online and offline activities was designed by volunteers to build the public's emotional connection with the art. Volunteers organized an event called "the day of the branches" to show the meaning of the Wood Circle to potential donors in the crowd-community by bringing them out to collect their own branches in nature: "We organized that 'day of the branches' to let people experience nature, but in the surroundings of the museum. And we hoped to make a link and let them feel why this piece was so important" (Project Volunteer 2). Interaction with donors in the crowd-community also occurred on the crowdfunding website where they could leave messages explaining why they donated. "We don't only want to have your money but we want to have your story as well. And yeah that's really nice. 'What is the connection between this person and art work?'" (Museum Staff Coordinator). Messages online contained supportive comments about the artwork and some personal stories about how donors saw their connection to the artwork: "First saw the Circle when I was 15. Gorgeous! Now, 35 years later, still impressive and inspiring" (comment, crowdfunding platform, translated by authors). "[The artist] motivates me and I hope many with me" (comment, crowdfunding platform, translated by authors).

The staff mimicked online comments when accepting face-to-face donations at the museum. All visitors who donated were asked to leave a written message of their story of how they connected to the artwork. Volunteers gathered these online and offline comments into a booklet that was published to

celebrate the artwork. The museum staff learned of the value in establishing a connection with donors in the crowd-community.

We didn't understand beforehand that we had to be far more actively involved than we were. . . . It was really about connecting people on different kinds of levels. T-shirts and buttons, it was nice, it gave a kind of exposure to the project, but that wasn't why the people donated the money. (Project Staff Coordinator)

Volunteers and staff revised a new end state: The project was no longer about just saving the art; it was about bringing the crowd-community into emotional connection with art.

Just to think that we got money from the most strange places. We would think, "Wow we didn't know that people from that part of the world or from this background were interested in doing this." So we found new audiences and an audience that we already knew, but we didn't know that we had this type of connection with. And that was maybe even more valuable than getting the money. (Project Staff Coordinator)

The room where the Wood Circle was displayed was transformed into a display of the crowdfunding project. A museum staff member explained, "We left the artwork on display and made the room into a crowdfunding project. So it was not only about displaying the artwork but also the [project of] saving it" (Project Staff Coordinator). An important aspect of this new room was to publicly display the co-ownership of the art with the donors in the crowd-community.

When you donated at least 20 euros, then your name would be on the wall and that list was growing every week. By the end of the project there was a long road of names on the wall. And for some people that was stimulating to see "I shared, I support this." (Project Volunteer 2)

This co-ownership was a crucial moment for the project's success.

What was nice is that people would actually say "I've saved one of these branches." People actually would say "This branch is mine, I bought it." People would come back to the museum and then show their family and point out their name and say, "look I made an effort, I contributed to the museum." (Project Staff Coordinator)

After the project officially ended, the room where the Wood Circle was on display was transformed into a living memorial for the project. "Even if we would display it in 100 years your names will still be connected to this artwork. It always will be this connection between the artwork and all the donations that are made" (Project Staff Coordinator). A project volunteer explained how the project added meaning to the art: "And I think it's nice when people see the work and understand that it was saved by large circle of people who supported this. I think this is an extra meaning of the artwork" (Project Volunteer 1).

The museum's desire to sustain their connection with the public shaped a new future end state: an aspiration to foster a long-term connection with crowd-community.

It was really a collective project. So it really came from the bottom up. That made it really nice that we could show people that this is what our museum is about: connecting yourself to an art work and connecting to other people who like artworks. (Project Staff Coordinator)

A staff member explained how their aims in the future were to keep the project alive:

We want to have a five-year jubilee. So this artwork will display again [in five years] and then we will invite all the people again just to keep this a little bit alive. So it is not done and finished, but it is something that we want to keep alive. (Project Staff Coordinator)

Through the project, they discovered a need for building a community:

It was not only for the money; because if you want to have money there are more easy ways to do it than crowdfunding, because it is really tough. What was really nice was to have all these people, groups of people contacting the museum and that's what we want now, to create a community. (Project Staff Coordinator)

### **Discussion**

Our aim in this article was to shed light on the growing phenomenon of paying to participate (Gleasure & Feller, 2016) and debates over the meaning of participation in research on civic crowdfunding (Davies, 2014). We examined how narratives of crowdfunding projects triggered action and interaction in relation to a changing institutional and organizational context through the concept of *end states* (Lundin & Söderholm, 2013). Our analysis illustrated how narrative end states were constructed over time, finding three types of narrative end states: plotted, revised, and future end states. Initial end states were plotted to fulfill a specific need of the project initiators. However, these plotted end states proved unsuccessful in mobilizing the crowd, which triggered an intense revision of end states as project initiators learned how to connect the crowd-community to the project. Through virtual and actual interaction with the crowd, new end states were constructed that ultimately inspired goals for greater crowd-community participation in the future. In this section, we discuss the implications of our analysis for research on narrative approaches to crowdfunding and for the theory and practice of civic crowdfunding.

#### ***Implications for Narrative Approaches to Crowdfunding***

Our research extends previous studies on the narrative construction of crowdfunding campaigns by examining how the narrative strategies of project initiators changed over time. Extant research on crowdfunding campaigns has analyzed project narratives in content that is carefully produced by project initiators before a campaign—for example, the video pitches and texts that explain the project purpose and goals in the platform (Manning & Bejarano, 2017). Whereas this type of analysis captures a snapshot

of the narrative strategies employed at the initiation of the project, our analysis of changing narrative end states reveals additional details on how project initiators changed their narrative strategies in the face of uncertainties experienced during the campaign. Specifically, by including an analysis of the provisional narratives (Bartel & Garud, 2009) found in online comments and crowd responses to offline events, we were able to show how project initiators changed their strategies in response to feedback from the crowd-community. Our results show that even short comments or nonreactions from the crowd-community have the potential to be valuable to project initiators by provisioning information (Agarwal et al., 2014) that can help them to fine-tune their narrative approach. In summary, our analysis provides a more dynamic view of how narrative strategies form and change over time in crowdfunding projects, and by implication, we suggest that future research should further examine how *crowd response* (and lack thereof) shapes the narrative strategies of crowdfunding projects over time.

### ***Implications for Civic Crowdfunding***

Our study also contributes to the nascent but growing area of research on civic crowdfunding. One of the central concerns for researchers of civic crowdfunding is the extent to which this type of crowdfunding enables meaningful participation of the crowd-community (Davies, 2014; Stiver et al., 2015). The results of our research suggest that to fully address this issue, it is important to shift the primary focus from the crowd-community's impact on the product or outcome of a crowdfunding project toward a broader examination of the influence of the crowd-community on the organizations and institutions that play a role in facilitating these projects.

For example, if we examine crowd influence in the Nature and Abby museum cases based on how participants' input shapes the final product (Morris, 2013; Smith, 2015), we might conclude that there was little change as a result of the crowd-community's input in our two cases. After all, both museums acquired the artifacts they had originally sought to acquire, and so one could argue that the crowd gave little input to shaping the final products, beyond the choice to fund the project. However, tracing plotted, revised, and future narrative end states gives additional insight into the influence of the crowd-community's participation. Namely, our analysis of end states shows how the experience of connecting with a crowd-community can change the strategic directions of the organizations associated with the projects. For example, after commencing the crowdfunding project, the Nature museum expanded their ambitions, from being an attraction to developing new programs aimed at becoming an open institution. We conclude that civic crowdfunding projects can serve as a connection point between organizations and the public by introducing new actors and content into processes of organizing (Castells, 2004). Accordingly, although most research on crowdfunding focuses on what mechanisms mobilize the crowd, an equally important question for future research on civic crowdfunding is how the crowd, through paying to participate (Gleasure & Feller, 2016), mobilizes organizational and institutional change.

While some scholars have argued that media discourses have aggrandized the democratizing potential of crowdfunding (Brabham, 2017), we contend that our account of narrative end states provides a counterbalance to such discourses by highlighting the interplay between the opportunities and challenges of civic crowdfunding. Our analysis shows how project initiators expended a significant amount of time and energy as they grappled with a number of uncertainties. The continual revision of end states



showed that project initiators faced a number of setbacks along the way and often took on new roles akin to "cultural entrepreneurs" (Morris, 2013, p. 274), performing demanding tasks to connect with the crowd-community in addition to their full set of regular responsibilities. Efforts to connect also extended far beyond mediated exchanges online, entailing intensive efforts to organize a number of local face-to-face initiatives alongside the online space. The claim in pro-crowdfunding media discourses that "if the people want it, they will pay for it" (Brabham, 2017, p. 984) seriously underestimates the realities of civic crowdfunding as a practice. However, though our analysis showed that interaction with the crowd-community inspired participatory visions, one successful project does not necessarily translate into a sustainable model of funding and engagement. Further research is needed to understand the potential of civic crowdfunding as a model for harnessing the participation of communities over time.

### ***Implications for Civic Crowdfunding Platforms***

Our research also has implications for platforms hosting civic crowdfunding projects. Namely, our study confirms that relationships between stakeholders in a civic crowdfunding project should be solidified and sustained beyond funding (Gleasure & Feller, 2016; Stiver et al., 2015). For example, we found that the Nature museum used social media as a site for continued connection, even after funds had been acquired, supporting previous research on the importance of social media for crowdfunding success (Moissejev, 2013). We also know that through online exchanges, project initiators can tap into the vision that potential funders have regarding their product or work, shifting the public from consumer to collaborator (Shirky, 2010).

By implication, crowdfunding platforms should contain features that support reciprocal engagement, or the "synergy obtained by giving to others and receiving from others" (Castells, 2004, p. 40). Communication scholars are well positioned to inform the design of such platforms to afford higher levels of sociability (Kool, 2011). Specifically, future research should explore what communication logics, or "templates for designing messages and discourse" (Stohl, 2014, p. 3), might best support meaningful online crowd-community participation in crowdfunding projects.

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