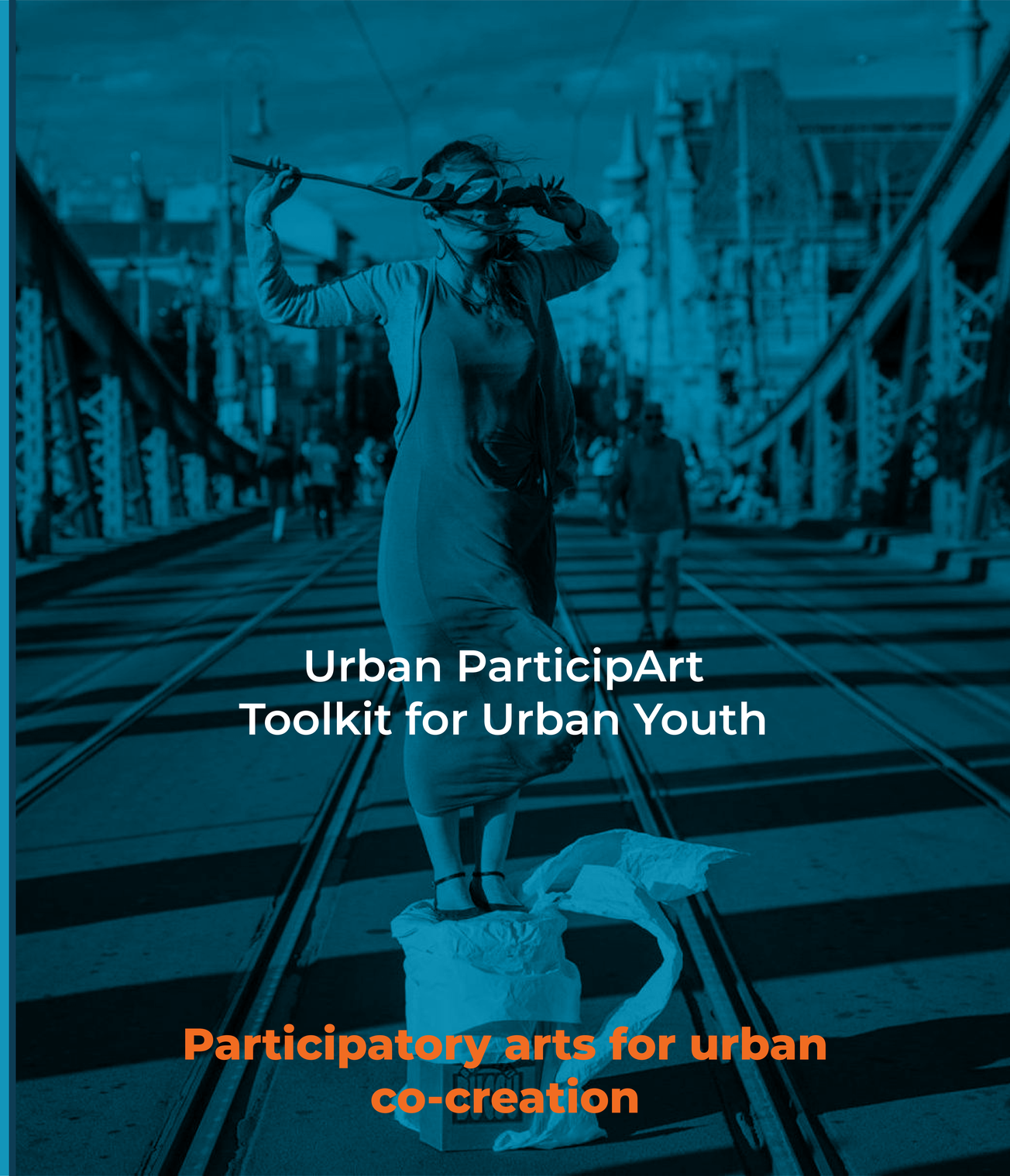
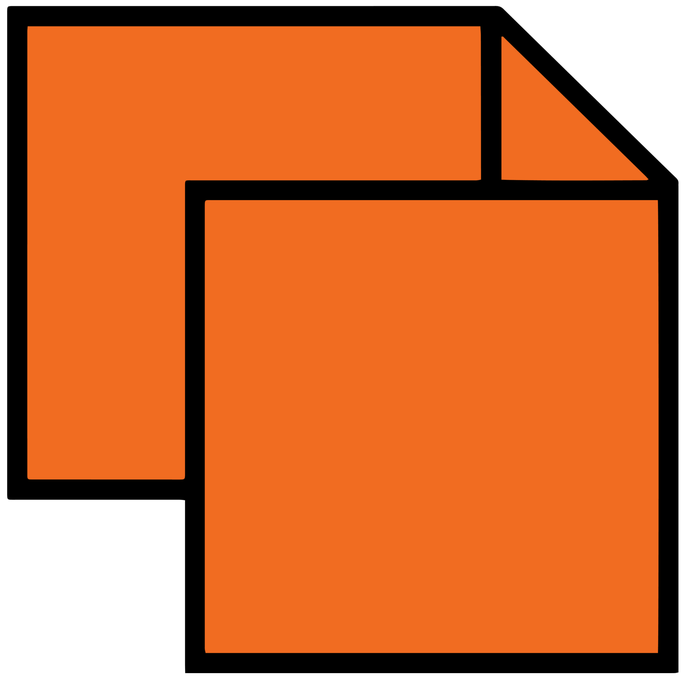


Urban ParticipArt Toolkit for Urban Youth

Participatory arts for urban co-creation

Urban ParticipArt



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Urban ParticipArt

Urban ParticipArt is an initiative to develop arts-based engagement methods to support urban youth. Our aim is to bring together the fields of participatory arts together with the fields of community building & urbanism in a way that invites all youth to collaborate, including those with fewer opportunities. The result: more inclusive and productive urban projects, driven by youth. Our three communities of practice, in Barcelona, Budapest & Rotterdam, serve as laboratories of European expertise in which we experiment and share with the world.

Why Urban ParticipArt

In recent years, European neighbourhoods have taken a more active role in shaping their community and living environment. There is a feeling that only the neighborhood can change the neighborhood. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us the importance of our community, and the cracks in the system.

At the same time, municipalities are increasingly open to sharing tasks with neighbourhoods. Urban professionals are increasingly using novel participatory approaches - like community mapping, design charrettes and digital tools - to engage the knowledge and power of citizens, who know their neighbourhoods and their needs best. The result is not only engaged citizens, but also better urban projects that serve the people who actually live, work and play in these urban spaces.

In most neighbourhood projects, the most difficult group to reach is youth. Traditionally, these processes were long, mainly cognitive, based on verbal communication, with formal language. We wanted to change this into a more dynamic participatory process, adapted to all types of intelligences and cultural backgrounds. Urban ParticipArt aims to be inclusive and to engage diverse communities.

How it works

Urban ParticipArt can be applied to urban projects about which people care. It is particularly effective in complex projects with multiple stakeholders & interests. It helps build mutual understanding. Typically, urban professionals team up with artists experienced in working with youth non-experts.

Our methods target the main parts of urban processes: developing the story of a site, generating ideas and communicating results. Urban ParticipArt processes can be initiated by anyone: citizens, the city, entrepreneurs, or a combination. It's important to note that Urban ParticipArt is not a recipe book, and nor is it necessary to engage specially-trained artistic teams. It's most effective to work with local artists who know the neighbourhood, adapting methods that are already successfully used in other contexts. It is also necessary to pay special attention to marginalised groups and determine which methods effectively reach them. In the near future it will also be possible to share your experiences and methods with participatory arts on www.urbanparticipart.eu.

Toolkit

Urban ParticipArt is being developed by organisations in Barcelona, Budapest and Rotterdam, representing south, central/east and north Europe. This geographic diversity allows us to develop and test our methodologies in a diversity of urban and cultural settings.

The toolkit includes a summary of some of the existing participatory arts tools that each organisation shared during the project and adapted for urban co-creation. The tools range from theatre to photography to drawing and digital tools. It's not meant as a comprehensive list, but an overview to spark ideas. We also share some more elaborate tools that we're cooking in the ParticipArt kitchen, along with our intentions for integrating digital and data approaches. These are the main innovative results. We also outline three urban Action Plans, which summarise how each organisation intends to practically apply ParticipArt methods with youth in urban co-creation projects in the coming period.

This toolkit should be read as only the starting point of our innovation in applying participatory arts in urban projects. This is a continuous process of experimentation that will develop over time. Through the toolkit and our website, we will share our results more broadly. We hope our experiences are inspiring for urban or cultural practitioners interested in applying participatory arts methods in their own projects.

Participatory Arts: From the Inside Out

Participatory arts are artistic methods that directly engage the audience in the creative process so that they become co-creators. That can take many forms, such as theatre, dance, music and photography.

Regardless of the artistic form, the premise is the same: experiential and collaborative activities as a foundation for creation. The result is methods that support us in connecting with other youth, sharing our skills and ideas and working together on our living environment. Through this approach, youth are engaged directly in the process, allowing them to simultaneously become co-authors, editors, and observers of the work. No longer a passive consumer, but a co-creator.

The secret sauce behind Urban ParticipArt methods is in facilitating from the inside out. That means supporting youth in first opening up to themselves and their inner values, passions and interests. They also find what they care about and also what they have to offer as individuals through their unique skills and capabilities. For example, Anna's spontaneity might be a great asset for generating new ideas, while Svetlana's contemplative approach may be useful in evaluating & prioritising those ideas.

Finding our inner core is also the starting point for identifying our shared human nature. By beginning here, it's possible to confidently connect to fellow youth and other citizens, thereby exploring together. That's also the first step in building a collective story for a shared topic, urban challenge or neighbourhood space.

Youth can also choose to take a step outside of their comfort zone by learning something new or meeting others in their neighbourhood who have a different background or passion than us. Urban ParticipArt methods invite us to do that in a structured, safe way.

Our work with participatory arts is grounded in seven principles.

Guru-Free Zone

Urban ParticipArt invites everyone to create! In fact, the best ideas often come from non-professionals and those in

Photo opposite page: The ParticipArt team testing the Ikigai tool in Barcelona in May 2021 with local professionals.

unrelated fields. An outsider's view brings new perspectives & fresh ideas. Any area of expertise is welcome, such that processes are inclusive and accessible to all levels. The only prerequisite is motivation and a willingness to be playful - although even that skill can be developed.

Own Strengths & Talents

Our fundamental assumption is that everyone has their own strengths, which are a mix of their talents, knowledge, skills and attitudes. One method of categorising personal abilities, developed by Harvard Professor Howard Gardner[1], is based on nine core skills: musical, visual, verbal, logical-mathematical, bodily, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic and existential. Regardless of the categorisation, however, the point remains: find our strengths and interests, and use that as a starting point for what we do.

Having Fun Is Serious Business

In the drive to serve or educate, professionals often forget a simple fact: people prefer to do things that are fun. Which also applies to urban & planning processes. Developing innovative methods that are enjoyable and productive is a matter of trial & error. The creation process should be fun, which includes room to experiment and to fail gracefully. The bonus is that when we do what we enjoy, we're more engaged and take ownership over our work.

Process Leads To Ownership

What you co-create is as important as the process you follow in making it. Participatory Arts helps people explore the narratives of their lives – the story of who they are – and to communicate that understanding to themselves and others. That's an opportunity to find their own voice within society, a prerequisite for citizens to take ownership and responsibility over urban space.

Liberating creativity together

We believe creating is particularly powerful in relation with others, both for generating innovative ideas and for personal growth. Such creation is based on facilitated interaction within a safe, supported group. That's why we strive for playful, reflective, critical spaces in which people undertake a shared creative journey with others who are learning and share a passion for urban action.

[1] Howard Gardner (2011), 'Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences', New York: Basics Books.

Critical Approach

We are creatures of habits and normally design interventions based on what previously worked. Working with different groups of youth and reaching those that standard approaches do not reach means rethinking the way we do things. We deliberately use participatory arts to poke holes in prevailing systems, to critically question our own choices and to continually search for a better way.not to work, we can critically question our choices and find alternatives that are more appropriate.

Intersectional lens

As facilitators we should first reflect about our position of privilege inside a community. Then we can discover all the identities in our groups and pay special attention to the ones that tipically led to discrimination. Refusing binary thinking and embracing the complexity of identities and group dynamics is an important starting point when working with diverse groups.

Citizens take the lead

"Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody". (Jane Jacobs)[2]

Cities around Europe are facing increasingly complex challenges, like lack of affordable housing, effects of climate change and racial inequality. These challenges often disproportionately affect youth, who don't usually have as many choices or resources as other citizens.

At the same time, we're moving into the era of the neighbourhood and co-created services. Historically, the state was the main provider of urban services. In the 1990's, the state's role was joined by market forces. The third paradigm shift, which we are experiencing today, is the incorporation of neighbourhood-led services.

Co-creation is the process that invites everyone, whether citizens, city officials, academics or entrepreneurs, an equal say. That goes for everything from provision of services to spending decisions to design choices for public space.

The co-creation approach breaks down traditional top-down or bottom-up hierarchies, replacing it with a multi-directional approach to problem solving. The result means tapping into the intelligence and special knowledge of citizens. It also leads to a greater sense of ownership of the outcomes, uncovering issues that traditional hierarchical approaches might overlook. Citizen-led co-creation makes it easy to find the knowledge, people, or other resources that outside experts don't know about.

Urban ParticipArt methods are designed to support co-creation. They can play a role in any stage. There are many ways to break down the co-creation process. We use three main stages: telling the story, generating ideas and communicating results. These are summarised briefly below. Note that the stages are not necessarily linear and one can start with any stage.

1. Telling the Story

Urban ParticipArt helps youth share the stories of their lives. Through activities like photography and theater, youth are invited to share stories about their lives; their struggles and their joys. These may be narrative stories about the past or dreams about the future. They may also be stories that touch deeper layers, like personal meanings and sensations. These stories help us learn from each other and build empathy. Once we hear stories of a particular snack bar owner who provides a listening ear to youth, we see her stand as more than a place to get fries or hang around, but as a pillar of the neighbourhood network. Stories also set the context for generating new ideas and taking action together in our cities. In other words, the raw materials for collaboratively writing a new story in our neighbourhoods. What is important to youth now? What do they like about our society and neighbourhood, and what do they want to change in it? This experiential data can be paired with more traditional quantitative forms of data collection, like maps and surveys.

2. Generating Ideas

Urban ParticipArt facilitates youth in imagining new possibilities for their communities. It's easy to get accustomed to the way things are now, in the way our communities operate and the way urban spaces

[2] Jane Jacobs (1961), The Death and Life of Great American Cities. p. 238.

are arranged. Artistic tools guide us in using our whole self—senses, emotions and intellect—to step outside of a situation and take different perspectives. By doing this with others, we use our collective intelligence to find new possibilities and explore alternatives. That could be solutions to social issues like gentrification or ideas for spatial projects, like the design of a neighbourhood square.

Urban ParticipArt tools are especially useful in generating ideas for complex projects in which there are diverse users and opinions. For example, a park in which neighbourhood youth want space for active sports and homeowners want space for relaxation & nature. By working together, it's possible to gain an understanding of other opinions and find collective solutions. This is often more than just a compromise, but a win-win.

3. Communicating Results

Urban ParticipArt facilitates youth in communicating their stories, ideas and results. That's an ongoing task through every urban co-creation process.

On the neighbourhood level, citizens and entrepreneurs should provide their feedback and may need to be mobilised to contribute. Plans and ideas may also have to be communicated to politicians or investors. If government, foundations or other partners have provided funding, it's often necessary to show the impact of an initiative. Arts are particularly useful in communicating the personal and social impact, including the experiential. That's something that statistics and numbers often can't capture.

The Urban ParticipArt app opens up even further possibilities for communication, which can include interactive activities or games. These can be played any time, without depending on performers. The app also provides possibilities to collect data, like location and visual or written stories, which can be further analysed.

Photo opposite page: Urban professionals and students collaboratively design and build a new park in Rotterdam (Proefpark de Punt), part of the Green Connection.

Three Cities, Three Experiences

Urban ParticipArt is a collaboration between communities of practice in three major European cities, representing south (Barcelona), central-east (Budapest) and north (Rotterdam) Europe.

Each community of practice is spearheaded by a grassroots participatory arts organisation that develops and tests ParticipArt methods. They focus on disseminating and sharing expertise and methods in their region.

Each of the three organisations collaborates with a range of community organisations, urban professionals, local government and academics, forming communities of practice. Each organisation is also embedded in different international networks, with a special focus on sharing with and inspiring each other and carrying out joint projects.

Barcelona Community of Practice
> INCA Catalunya

Urban ParticipArt's Barcelona Community of Practice is led by INCA (International Network for Culture and Arts) Catalunya. INCA involves and stimulates youth, particularly the disadvantaged, so that they develop their skills and active participation through culture and the arts. It uses tools from theatre, animation, clowning, social circus, dance, and audiovisual techniques, especially based on non-formal education. INCA mainly targets communities at risk, with the aim of developing new strategies for inclusion and social intervention.

Within Urban ParticipArt, INCA especially focuses on methods for building narratives in both conventional and non-linear ways. Its main test site is the neighbourhood of Raval in Barcelona. INCA has built an extensive number of international partnerships since 2005.

Spain has a relatively strong tradition of active citizenship, particularly in larger cities like Barcelona. There are major networks of artistic professionals and community organisations. Although urban design and architectural traditions are very strong in Spain, design is usually driven by the expert as auteur. Participatory planning traditions are weak, and formal urban processes organised by cities seldom provide much space for citizens. The challenge INCA tackles is in using grassroots artistic work to link the daily reality of urban life with formal political & decision-making processes of public and private actors.

On the next pages we outline the three tools that the Barcelona Community of Practice shared in Urban ParticipArt as part of the research phase. We also summarise the urban context in which we work and our upcoming initiatives.

Photo opposite page: INCA Catalunya facilitating an arts event with neighbourhood residents.

The Window

The Window is a participatory performance that offers an immersive experience in the daily life of residents. The journey is built through narrative and sound. The result is intimate and ephemeral connections between inhabitants and visitors who, for a short moment, share the present through the sound of voices and the resonance of their stories.

Approach

A street or other non-traditional urban location is chosen for the performance. Two artists collect the audio and the stories from the local community, which are shared online with their permission. During the performance, one performer narrates stories that are a mix of personal histories and moments from real life. On the other side of the 'window', the audience secretly listens to their stories through headphones. The spectators are involved in the action and transformation of this space during the performance. In this way, a unique fictional environment is created for each performance and location.

Extra value for urban projects

The Window provides a poetic urban map of a place and inhabitants. The result is a deeper appreciation of a place and its meanings. Since the storyteller is anonymous, we can appreciate the performance with fewer labels. The resulting stories inspire participants and point to opportunities that might be followed when planning social or spatial interventions.

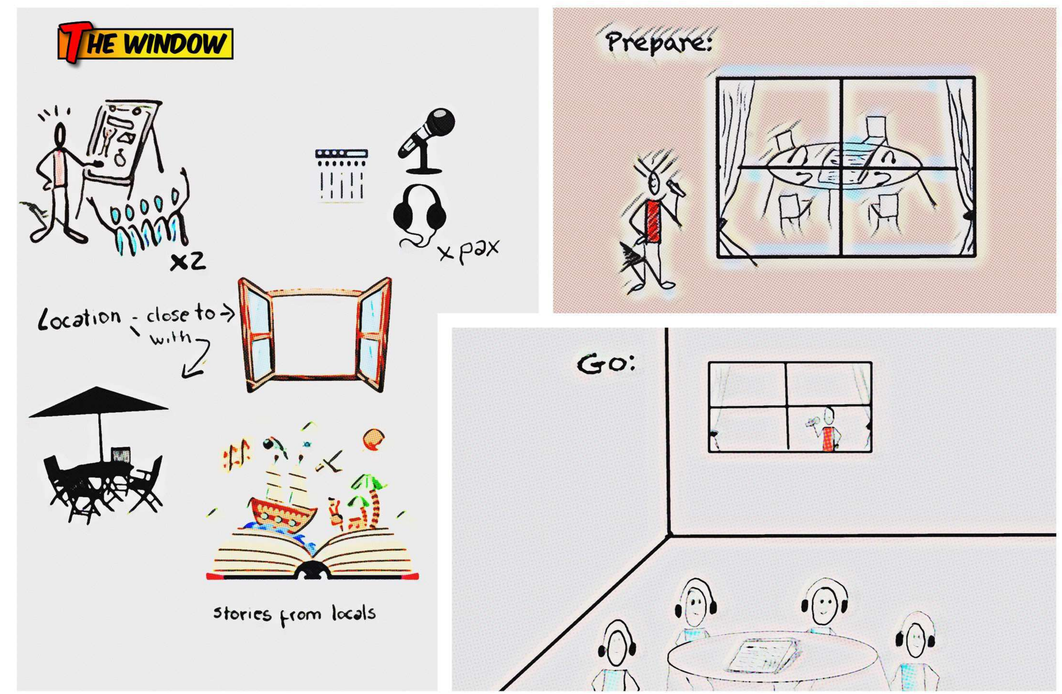
Tips

The performers need to be excellent improvisers to interact with the audience and the storytellers on the spot. However, they should also have a concrete theme in mind and be aware of that context during the performance. Any urban site can be chosen for the performance, but it should include a 'window', or a place from where somebody can spy on others. Also be aware that microphones, headphone and other audio equipment is required to facilitate the performance.

Urban ParticipArt app

We are now exploring ways to augment the Window with the Urban ParticipArt app. This includes allowing the narrator to give instructions to participants through their headphones, for example, on where to move and what to look at. The location tracking can also be used to track where participants move through space.

Photo: Performance of The Window in Barcelona.



Winter Lights

Winter lights (Lluernes d'hivern) is a site-specific community theatre show held in the garden of the old Santa Creu hospital in Barcelona, in the neighborhood of Raval.
It was the result of a process of community artistic creation around local cultural diversity. The show was carried out by 400 inhabitants and around 30 organisations, representing the diversity of the neighbourhood.

Approach

The writing and production of the show was generated step-by-step with participants. That's unlike a classic production, in which the script is written at the beginning of the process. Community participants contributed myths and stories from their cultures. These were linked to the common thread in the script, the winter solstice.

INCA Catalunya designed the project, facilitated the process, and staged it. A community organisation, ToT Raval Foundation, was responsible for the interaction with the neighbourhood. Their involvement from the beginning was essential in order to mobilise participants, one of the main challenges of the initiative.

Extra value for urban projects

The process of building the performance was a major effort that resulted in many new neighbourhood connections, including among inhabitants who wouldn't normally come into contact. Both participants and observers commented that by working and performing directly in a specific urban space, they experienced it in new ways and developed a deeper attachment to it. This sense still lingers among those involved, even years after the original performance.

Tips

In Winter Lights the process and the result are tightly connected, with the exact outcome uncertain. The participants are both the engine and the protagonists, which is why it was essential to base the initiative on deep research and a commitment to participants. Responding to a specific need in the community helped drive participants. Our group was diverse, so the choice of an adaptable, universal theme (rituals around the sun) was key to focus on what unites participants rather than what divides.

Linking with existing artistic activities and networks in the neighbourhood helped to take advantage of existing energies. It was also essential to respect the availability, pace and quality of each participant, which varied considerably. It was essential that the process be inviting and attractive from the first moment, rather than only focusing only on the final performance. That meant building an inviting process that kept participants enthusiastic and committed. Working in short-term phases and with concrete but flexible objectives helped participants see continued and tangible progress without feeling overwhelmed.

Further resources

Watch a video of Winter Lights in Barcelona:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COCVb3RqATs

Photo: A group of citizens during the performance of Winter Lights in Barcelona.

Open Doors

Open Doors is a form of immersive theatre that allows the audience to freely roam through a building containing several performance spaces. These spaces are often disused or abandoned buildings, and other places that are not meant for theatre performances. The action of the play is deconstructed, often reordered, and condensed with multiple scenes that play simultaneously in different parts of a building. Audiences must choose where to go, which characters to follow and which rooms to stay in. In this way, the performance is highly structured while encouraging active participation of audiences.

Approach

In Open Doors, the audience is central and chooses the show they experience. They are normally asked not to view the work from a seat, but to experience it by moving around, making decisions and finding their action. The performance can be inspired by a diversity of elements, including the architecture, layout and atmosphere of the performance space. Immersive elements can include gaming and technology that helps blend the performance with everyday reality.

Extra value for urban projects

One of the advantages of immersive theatre techniques like Open Doors is that the dramatic composition can be inspired by a real urban place and context. Our Open Doors approach especially focuses on experiencing the authentic nature of an urban context, which can help deepen the audience's understanding of a place or community. Including sensorial elements adds an extra dimension to a traditional urban analysis and narrative.

Tips

Immersive theatre presents a series of unique narrative and practical challenges. Be aware that not all theatre facilitators have this expertise, and each will also have their own specialties within immersive theatre. In all cases though, be sure that the role of the audience is at the heart of the decisions made by artists. Key starting points for planning a performance: Who are the audience members? What is their role in the piece? How do they interact with performers? Pay close attention to the sound, light, the set and props, which often have a crucial role.

Urban ParticipArt app

The flexible format of immersive theatre presents many opportunities for digital support. Virtual and augmented reality presents new possibilities to enhance the sensorial and immersive experience. Some performances could also be potentially adapted into a fully online format, which can bring the performance to audiences who live further away or those who want to experience the performance on their own time.

We also intend to explore how the ParticipArt app could be used to support gaming formats within immersive theatre. Data collection possibilities focus on tracking the journeys and decisions of audience members during a performance, the result being a series of overlapping personal narratives about one place.

Photo: Performance of Open Doors in an historic building in Barcelona.

Urban Context: Raval, Barcelona

INCA's primary urban laboratory is the neighbourhood of Raval, in Barcelona. Until recently, it was one of the most densely populated urban areas in the world. When people talk about Raval, they usually imagine dark places, dangerous streets, drugs, sex work, and a multiculturalism not integrated in the city. In the eyes of the well-thinking bourgeoisie, this is probably Raval. For those of us who live it, Raval is a place of subculture, authenticity, street life, and of good and evil at the same moment, in the same person, in the same action.

In the late 80's, the government began taking an active role in attempting to change the neghbourhood, closing many businesses and demolishing entire blocks associated with drug dealers or sex work to make way for new squares. Displaced people were often transferred to newer flats on the outskirts. The active gentrification by authorities, part of a process they call esponjament (mopping up), includes projects like the construction of a hotel, a students' residence, a police station and office blocks on demolished sites.

The result of these urban regeneration schemes, which continue today, is drastic changes to the social, environmental and economic characteristics of Raval. The neighbourhood is further affected by the mass tourism that characterises much of Barcelona. In this context, INCA especially works to ensure that all Raval residents have a voice in their neighbourhood, especially groups marginalised by society or city authorities. Through our own networks and partnerships with community organisations, we invite shopkeepers, recent immigrants, sex workers and poor residents to participate in our interventions and make their voice heard. We also aim to develop Urban ParticipArt methods to stimulate citizens to take step-by-step action to improve their conditions and their neighbourhood, while ensuring everyone has a place.

Photo opposite page: Local activism against speculation in the housing market in the neighbourhood of Raval.

Upcoming initiatives

Our initiatives in the coming period include further development of our new Ikigai tool. We plan to apply Ikigai in two urban projects. The first is a sensory tour of Underground Raval, in our home neighbourhood. The second is an initiative in the city of Granollers called Any City Something, which is our ParticipArt action plan.

Ikigai in Japanese culture defines the reason for being an individual. It also indicates the source of the value of life, or what makes it worth living. Ikigai refers to both the present and future projection: having a goal or project that can be a source of happiness. The question we pose: what is the Ikigai of a neighbourhood? We invite participants to experience their urban context through a game-like narrative. We start with a chosen story as a framework and invite participants to join us in creating additional content about a specific space. The resulting recordings form a sensory and artistic promenade tour that automatically plays on an app when participants arrive at preset locations, along with live performances. Together with our ParticipArt partners, INCA organised the first test of Ikigai in Barcelona in May 2021 during a community arts festival. As a framework, we used the story of Chloe from the book Invisible Cities by Italo Calvino.

Based on our successful first experience, we will continue to develop Ikigai further. We aim to merge our different methods and approaches into a coherent workshop format that we can offer to urban communities. This flexible format can be developed in various directions depending on the objectives of the particular community. We also want to explore the possibilities for using Ikigai to more concretely support urban co-creation processes. We'll do that by playing in urban space, gathering the experiences of residents and professionals in site-specific activities. We will also further explore how the ParticipArt app could support Ikigai, including the possibilities for collecting data and wishes from participants.

Ikigai will be applied in our new initiative Underground Raval. We use the dynamic underground life of the neighbourhood to transform the tall buildings and narrow streets into a multitude of events. We will design a sensory tour visiting the places of notable figures who lived in Raval with a spirit of rebellion, taking advantage of its energy and helping to create that atmosphere of a unique neighborhood in the center of a city already sold to tourism. Our chosen character is Jean Genet (see text box) because he lived and described the neighbourhood that he helped to mark as underground. He was an authentic character who lived the neighbourhood in its depth. Using an app, we mark the points where Jean Genet frequented. As the viewer moves through those places, a sequence of videos are activated on the app. These show performances inspired by the events described by the writer and the surrounding context in a totally different way. What is generated is a historical vision, a narrative journey, an inspiration to rethink places in a critical way. Is there a way to rethink spaces according to the Ikigai of a place, its people, its historical moment?

Jean Genet
Jean Genet wrote Diary of the Thief in 1949 while he was in prison (when he already had the support of Cocteau and Sartre), years after his time in Barcelona. He came to town in the 1930s as a young criminal. The son of a sex worker in Paris, he left behind an adoptive family and an adolescence plagued with robberies, stays in reformatories and in the army, from where he was expelled when he was discovered having sex with a partner. In Barcelona he settled in Barrio Chino, or as it is now known, Raval. That was the ideal place for a person like him. It was a place of crime, with seedy pensions, old cafes, theatres, cabarets and brothels. Genet makes a vivid portrait of his experiences. Reliving its corners with contemporary eyes is not only a great experience, but it gives us the possibility to ask ourselves "What is a neighbourhood? What is the use of living together and so closely?"

Action Plan Barcelona: Any City Something Interesting

Inca Catalunya focuses its action plan for the next steps of ParticipArt on the city of Granollers. The goal is to stimulate and support the revival of Granollers, in partnership with residents and according to ParticipArt principles.

Granollers is located 30 minutes by car or train from Barcelona. It's characterised by an old town that dates to medieval times and special heritage elements. The city developed industrially on the Barcelona-Girona train line. It lost part of its charm due to careless urban development in the fifties. Now it is looking to re-engage in its traditional role as a small town and artisan city.

Granoller's good fortune is its geographical position between Barcelona and Girona. However, that was also the cause of one of its worst historical moments: the civil war bombing in 1938 that caused many deaths and injuries and the devastation of the city. Because of this, numerous shelters were built in Granollers. The Refuge in the Plaza de Maluquer y Salvador was used to protect civilians from bombardments. It has four interconnected rooms, with a vent facing the square and a 25-meter long common corridor. Its capacity is 450 people. Today one can visit and discover how and where the population of Granollers took refuge.

The concept of refuge inspired us to ask: Where in the city do you take refuge when you want to feel protected? It is an 'artistic' question, and therefore open to metaphor and poetry. We have created a type of audio guide to support citizens in searching for this refuge while walking through the city. We invite people to make travel decisions, to follow our suggestions, to think about something in particular or to not think. We particularly encourage them to do something outside of their comfort zone. Only rarely do we explain specific elements related to urban planning.

What interests us is to pay homage to those conflictive urban aspects of the city so that at the end of the visit, people can write a proposal for concrete change. That's specifically an invitation to transform one of the locations on the route into a place of 'safety'. That's not in the sense of being free from danger, but as a place for human thriving.

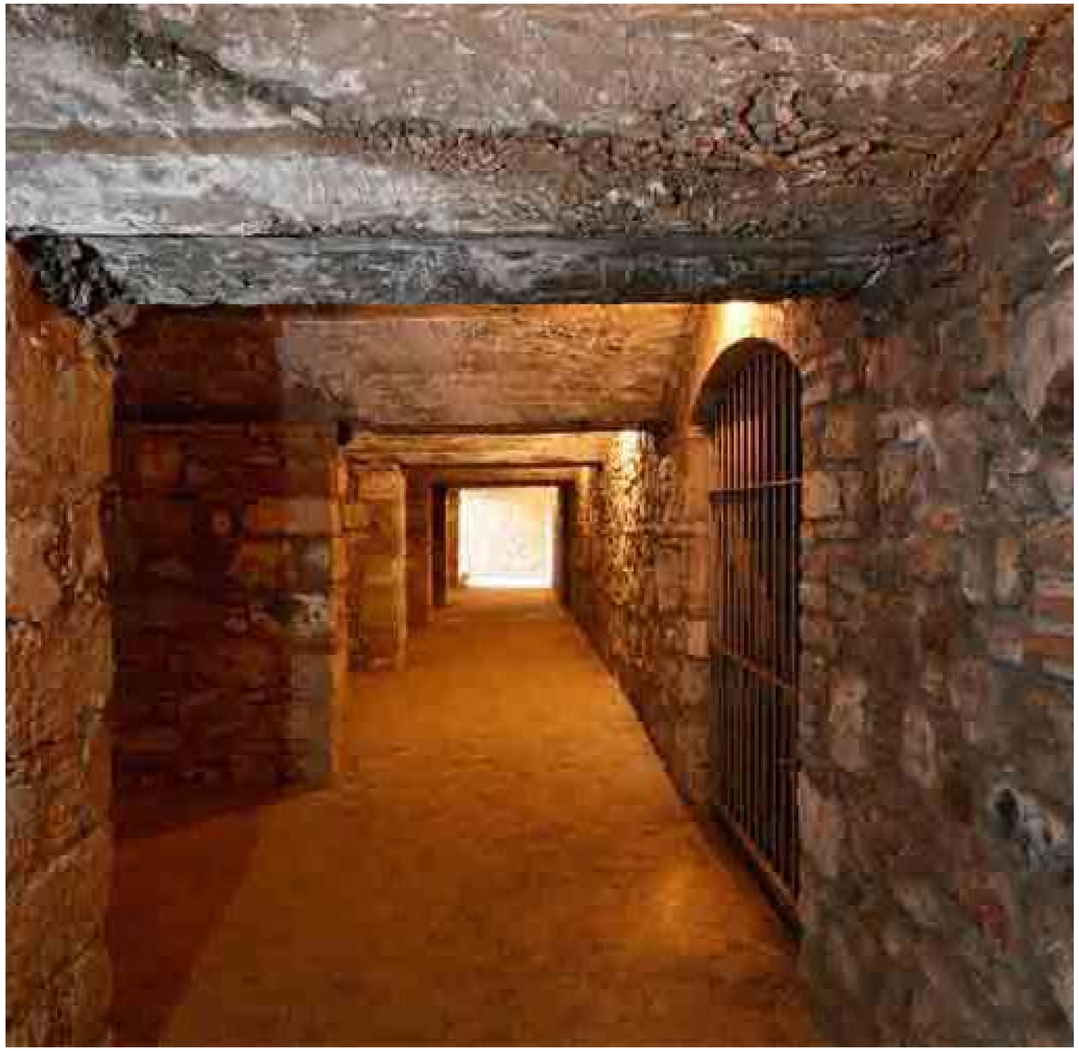


Photo: The underground bunker of Refuge in the Plaza de Maluquer y Salvador.

Rotterdam Community of Practice
> Home of Participation

Urban ParticipArt's Rotterdam Community of Practice is led by Home of Participation (HoP). HoP is a collective of professionals that researches, develops and tests methods for participatory arts and co-creative processes. Within Urban ParticipArt, HoP specialises in methods for generating ideas & solutions with youth. It is developing expertise in adapting Photovoice, a tool for storytelling & photography, in urban projects. HoP also focuses on embedding methods in structural decision-making and financing processes in neighbourhoods.

Our main test site is in Rotterdam West, where we collaborate with local initiatives and networks. Testing and projects especially take place in the Green Connection, an 8-km green space connecting 20 citizen initiatives. HoP is also connected with local initiatives & artists in Amsterdam and cooperates with the art education and community departments of Fontys University and Artez University.

Rotterdam is the second-largest city in The Netherlands, one of the most advanced countries in Europe in terms of participatory urbanism. Nevertheless, there's still a lot of work to do. New tools are needed to attract a wider audience, especially youth and marginalised groups. And while participatory methods are known among professionals, there's a need to further integrate them as standard protocol in urban projects while also making them more accessible for citizens in taking the lead. We are working to embed our methods in neighbourhoods so that Urban ParticipArt becomes more than a set of tools that are picked up on a whim, but an integral part of neighbourhood decision-making.

On the following pages we outline the three tools that the Rotterdam Community of Practice shared in Urban ParticipArt as part of the research phase. We also summarise the urban context in which we work and our upcoming initiatives.

Photo opposite page: Residents of the Heemraadssingel in Rotterdam share impressions of their photographs during a Photovoice workshop.
[3] The Photovoice process for Who Owns the Heemraadssingel? was facilitated by Photovoice expert Karine Versluis (www.picturebridgefoundation.nl)

Photovoice

Photovoice is a method of participatory photography and storytelling. Facilitators guide groups through activities to explore an area or share stories from their lives. In the project Who Owns the Heemraadssingel, participants carried out photographic activities to understand what they liked and didn't like in this urban green space. We also carried out activities to understand the perspectives of different users of the space and mapped our experiences. The resulting data can be used to deepen understanding. Photovoice is easy for anyone. It's an especially good method for those less comfortable with speaking or writing.

Approach

A Photovoice process begins with a research question or topics to explore. Participants are invited to join the group. The facilitator guides activities for taking photos. The group discusses the photos, reflects on the experience and writes or dictates narratives to accompany the photos. The results are then shared more broadly through an exhibition, book or debate. A final reflection is also the chance to decide how to move forward with the insights gained.

Extra value for urban projects

One of the main strengths of Photovoice is the use of images: this can help communicate what cannot be put into words. That can be especially useful for urban projects about space, since photos can show a space and people in it. Photography is also a great means to help groups explore new ideas and organise their vision of changes they want to see in their neighbourhood or community. Photos are easy to understand, share and replicate, making it a great way to communicate ideas. An end exhibition of results is also an excellent chance to bring various urban stakeholders together or to begin a dialogue.

Tips

Most Photovoice processes also offer to teach participants photography techniques. This increases their motivation and improves photos quality and diversity. For this reason, it's best to have a facilitator with advanced knowledge of photography. Although participants often bring their own cameras or phones, it's always good to have a few extras for those who may not have a camera. It's best to use a diversity of games, visual methods, movement activities, presentations

Van wie is de Heemraadssingel?

Een plaatje zegt meer dan duizend woorden. Daarom zijn foto's zo geschikt om verhalen te vertellen. Sinds het najaar van 2019 heeft een flinke groep bewoners en gebruikers van de Heemraadssingel honderd fotoverhalen gemaakt. Samen vertellen de verhalen wat de betekenis van de Heemraadssingel voor de makers is. De vertellers zijn net zo divers als de manier waarop ze de Heemraadssingel zien en gebruiken.

De foto's zijn geen kunst voor de kunst maar een manier om nieuwe ideeën over de Heemraadsingel te ontwikkelen. De Groene Connectie wil met het fotoproject duidelijk maken hoe belangrijk de Heemraadssingel voor veel mensen is. Daarom is het belangrijk dat al die verhalen verteld worden.

Het project begon met vijf bijeenkomsten. Fotografe Karine Versluis van Picture Bridge Foundation deelde tips en trucs. Door de uitvoering van creatieve opdrachten ontwikkelden de deelnemers snel hun talent om met andere ogen naar de omgeving te kijken. In de foto's is het persoonlijke perspectief steeds op een andere manier zichtbaar.

De fotoverhalen zijn onderdeel van een groter project waarin bewoners kunst maken met de Heemraadssingel als onderwerp. Zo groeit langzaam maar zeker een flinke collectie. Die wil De Groene Connectie graag laten zien, maar door Corona is het nog niet mogelijk om een tentoonstelling te organiseren. Zodra het weer kan, gaat ze daarmee aan de slag.

Wie een bijdrage wil leveren, met foto's, verhalen of andere kunst, is meer dan welkom. De Groene Connectie gaat graag het gesprek aan. Dat begint met een mailtje naar *info@degroeneconnectie.nl.*

Fotografieteam: *Roger Doodeman, Henk van Doorn, Natalia Echomaize, Tom van Geest, Stijn van Hulzen, Wouter Lasonder, Petra Meulenberg, Jolanda Reijnen, Lotte Tjallingii*

Partners
Concept & organisatie: Tom van Geest (Studio Geest)
Workshop facilitering: Karine Versluis (Picture Bridge Foundation)
Locatie: Het Wijkpaleis

"Ik wandelde in de buurt van de advocatenkantoren, het rijke stuk aan de Noordwestkant. Veel huizen hebben daar hekken. Dat was me nog nooit eerder opgevallen. Een beetje vreemd. In een stad woon je samen, maar zij zetten hekken. Het huis stond te koop." (Wouter Lasonder)

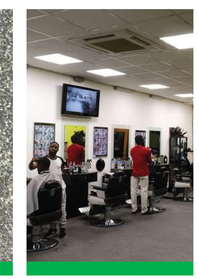
"Dit is de brug als je richting de Schietbaanlaan loop, daar woon ik. Ik kom hier meestal elke dag. Voor de brug beslis ik met de hond of we links- of rechtsaf of de brug over gaan. Ik voel me daar heel erg thuis. En als je je rondje gelopen hebt, krijg je echt het gevoel dat je weer bijna thuis bent. De brug voelt als het middelpunt van de Heemraadssingel." (Jolanda Reijnen)

"Ik denk dat dit wel één van de drukste plekken van de HRS is. De auto's rijden hier hard, de tram komt voorbij, er zijn veel fietsers en ze hebben allemaal haast. De twee meisjes kijken alsof ze zich daar allemaal niks van aantrekken. Ze zien eruit alsof ze de koningen van de Heemraadssingel zijn. Ik heb een haat-liefdeverhouding met deze plek. Er gebeurt zoveel tegelijk, daar moet je wel van houden. Door de enorme drukte is oversteken soms bijna onmogelijk, dat haat ik. Maar altijd als ik hier kom, voelt het als thuis komen." (Lotte Tjallingii)

"Het hekwerk van het Heemraadsplein in de herfstzon. Leuke contrasten tussen licht en schaduw, scherp, onscherp, rond en rechtlijnig, natuur en cultuur." (Henk van Doorn)

"Deze foto is gemaakt op de markt bij station Blaak. Ik zou willen dat we elke week markt hadden op het Heemraadsplein. Ik denk dat dat de makkelijkste manier is om het plein aan te pakken. Je hebt voor een markt geen dure gebouwen nodig en het is voor iedereen toegankelijk." (Natalia Echomaize)

"Dit is de bovenkant van een tafel. De tafel heeft een mooi patroon. De vogels poepen hier normaal gesproken op. De tafel is nu schoongemaakt door de regen. Normaal is de tafel veel viezer." (Stijn van Hulzen)



"De Barbershop aan de Nieuwe Binnenweg. Eén van de plekken waar het altijd druk is. Terwijl op deze straat een heel aantal barbershops zijn." (Rogier Doodeman)

Some of the photo stories from citizen participants in the Heemraadssingel PhotoVoice process were published in a local newspaper as a teaser for the upcoming community exhibition.

and both Individual & group tasks in order to accommodate different learning styles and preferences.

ParticipArt app

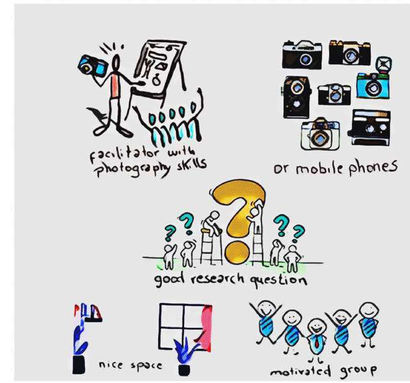
In the future, the ParticipArt app may be used to help organise photo stories and to pin them to locations on the map. By organising the data digitally, it also becomes possible to digitally analyse the results to find new insights. The app may also be useful to guide certain Photovoice activities that don't require a facilitator. Digital enhancement, for example through photo modification or augmented reality tools, also provide new possibilities to enhance Photovoice activities. Digital gamification also offers new possibilities for sharing the final results, for example through an online exhibition or interactive walking tours led by an app.

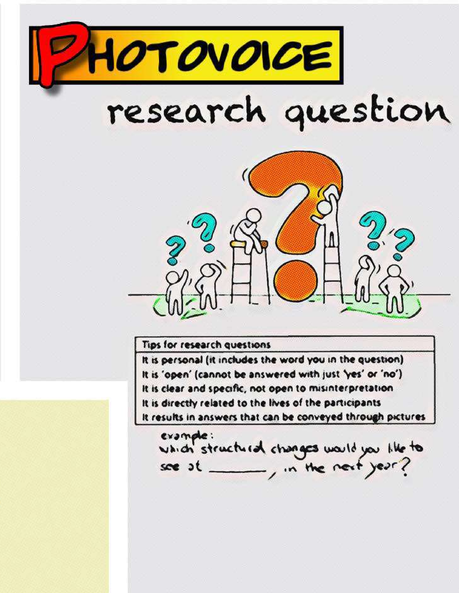
Further resources

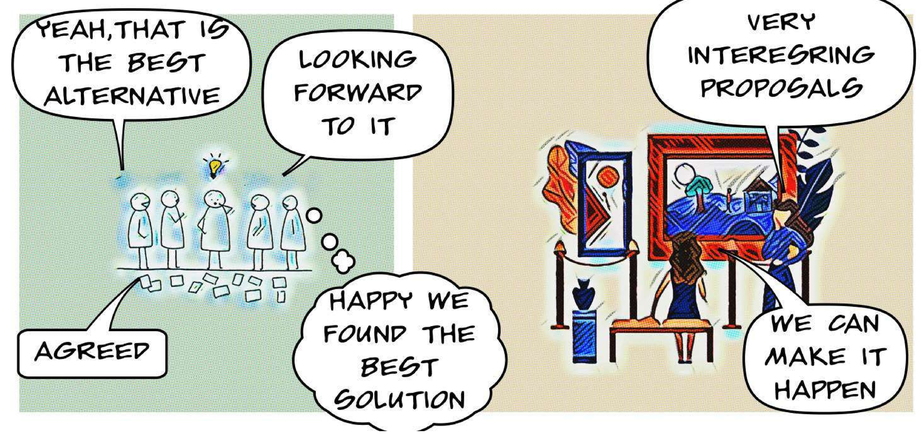
Photovoice Facilitator's Guide by Reuters International

Manual and Resource Kit (2007) by Photovoice Hamilton

Photovoice Manual (2014) by S. Mohammed & S. Sajun







Embodied Conversations

Embodied conversations are non-formal, semi-structured interviews in which we focus not only on verbal communication but also the non-verbal[4]. This inspires drawings that represent the emotions that arise during the conversation. We find this method especially useful to assess groups, including our own, during or after intense conflicts. In this case, participants draw from the ideal format of a collective, including what we need and what we are willing to give to the group.

Approach

Conversations begin with a research question to explore along with a few pre-determined questions. One facilitator guides the conversation and another captures the emotion, non-verbal communication in a drawing or other visual artwork. At the end of the interview participants are given feedback. That includes sharing the drawings and checking if they agree with the topics and reasons collected by the facilitators. It's also common to organise an exhibition with the art, along with keywords and a description of the process, or a final report with the main conclusions and anonymised results.

An advantage of this method is that it can be carried out with individuals. That's useful if facilitators are not fully familiar with the underlying conflict or topic. That can be useful when there are very dominant group members or if some members don't feel safe in expressing ideas. It also simply be useful to collect individual perspectives.

Extra value for urban projects

Embodied conversations are especially useful in conflicts in neighbourhoods, whether that's youth groups, project teams or resident interest groups. It's also a method for tackling concrete disputes about the use of urban space. For example, whether to build a tree or a parking space on a specific location, or whether a new green space should focus on ecology or recreation. Using art as the medium takes the discussion away from a 'war of words' and into an exploration of underlying fears, desires or other emotions.

Tips

During an embodied conversation, it is important to create a safe space and give enough space to participants to freely express themselves. Leave more time than you think. In our experience, for example, three questions usually takes at least an hour with each person.

ParticipArt app

We haven't yet explored the possibilities of integration drawing functions in the ParticipArt app, although this is certainly something to consider in the future. It may also be possible to use digital tools to conduct embodied conversations at a distance, for example when it's not possible for participants to be in the same place. It may also be fruitful to adapt the method for self-guided conversations. Here the challenge will be to provide space for free expression while maintaining a feeling of safety for participants.

[4] Tracing Embodied Conversations is a technique in the Diversity and Inclusion programme in the EHBK. Those tools were implemented by Karolina Wargin and Amber Roodenburg (ArtEZ students), with the support of Ema Nik Thomas (OT301) and Iris Van Santen (Atana trainee)

Photo: Image from a workshop in Embodied Conversation in The Netherlands.

Urban Playwalks

Playwalks are play-based walking tours through the city. The intention is to play as a group to create more awareness of the city and change the way we interact with and move through urban space. Playwalks can be used to explore a specific site, or to explore general themes of urban life and its unwritten rules.

Approach

In Rotterdam, Urban Playwalks are organised monthly by Lily Higgins and Bruno Setola. Participants are invited through social media to meet at a specific location. They are then guided in moving through the city and carrying out tasks or activities. Playwalks take around 3 to 4 hours.

Examples include experiential walks through a harbour in which participants use their senses to discover new sounds and sights. Or, a 'slow walk', in which participants walk through a busy train station as slowly as possible, contrasting the normal behaviour of passer-bys hurrying to catch a train.

In each case, the intention is to step out of social conventions and routines in the city. Instead, participants are encouraged to test new ways of moving through a city and experiencing it. Doing this as a group encourages people to take more risks and also takes advantage of group intelligence.

Extra value for urban projects

The Urban Playwalk team in Rotterdam has been asked to use their methods to support several urban planning processes. A playwalk helps participants rediscover an urban space or community and generate inspiring, meaningful ideas for it. Playwalks can also serve an educational purpose. For example, to help participants get acquainted with people, places or history. They can also help participants understand the unwritten rules of their community as a first step toward making new rules.

Tips

The possibilities for Playwalks are endless, so it is useful for facilitators to create a package of possible formats, including photos or videos of previous examples. This makes it easier for clients or partners to understand possibilities. It can also be helpful to hold regular events in order to build a community. Linking Playwalks to existing events or festivals can bring new participants.

The role of facilitators in Playwalks is key. They not only organise and guide the activity, they lead by example. In this way, participants are encouraged to step out of their comfort zone. Sometimes it may be necessary to partner with an urbanist, historian or other professional to provide expertise or to assist in gathering feedback.

Urban ParticipArt app

Bruno and Lily from the Playwalk team have already explored the possibilities for digitally-guided Playwalks (see example below). The app is also used to gather experiential data from participants, at specific moments during the walk, when they can give feedback through different media. Tagging this to specific locations produces a Playwalk map to inform urban planning.

Further resources

Play a digitally-guided Urban Playwalk (commissioned by RAUM Utrecht, 2021):
game.urbanplaywalks.com

See video of a Playwalk:
https://vimeo.com/457694096

Get in touch with the organisers:
bruno@playspace.cc
lily@theinterventionbureau.com
@urbanplaywalks on Instagram

Photo: Urban Playwalkers do a joint activity near the Rotterdam central train station. The Playwalk team is often asked to apply their methods in participatory city-making processes.

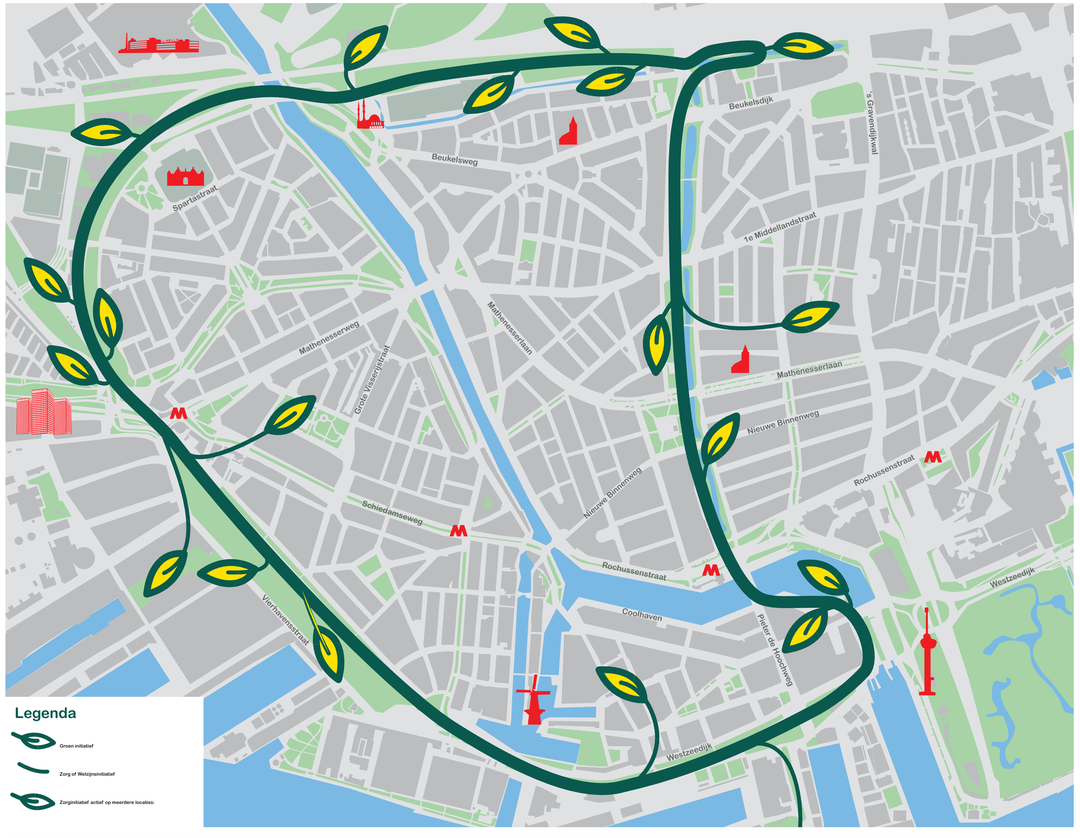
Urban Context: The Green Connection, Rotterdam

HoP's primary laboratory is in Rotterdam West. Citizen-led organisations are leading the way in neighbourhood transformation. One of these organisations is the Green Connection. It facilitates the 8-km green space, which is a diverse meeting place, a breeding ground for local initiatives & entrepreneurs, a platform for ecological education and a supplier of local food. We also work closely with Culture Cooperation Delfshaven (see text box below).

HoP has supported various participatory arts processes in the Green Connection. Our primary focus is the multi-year process: Who Owns the Heemraadssingel? The Heemraadssingel is a beautiful 19th century waterway on the eastern edge of the Green Connection. The city has begun a major process to redevelop the space and there are also a lot of competing ideas about how to use the space. We kicked off our involvement by supporting a Photovoice process with a diverse team of citizens. They explored the space together. The results are now being used together with fifteen other artistic projects, to support the redevelopment process.

Photo: We have been working with the Green Connection for a number of years in the neighbourhood of Schiemond.

We are developing a data-driven process with residents, using artistic methods to gather data. The result is intended to be not only a traditional design plan for renewal of the public space, but also green energy, affordable housing, mobility and local entrepreneurship. We also aim to develop Urban ParticipArt methods to stimulate coalitions of citizen initiatives in the space and for marginalised citizens to take over management & maintenance. We are also using this process as a test case for development of a neighbourhood-based digital system to mobilise citizens, keep them informed and provide participation tools. The Urban ParticipArt app will be a major feature of this system, along with the offline methods that we are continuing to develop.



Map: The Green Connection is a 8-km green route linking 20 social-green initiatives in Rotterdam West.

Upcoming initiatives

Our main focus in the short term is our work in the Heemraadssingel in Rotterdam. The experiences, methods and digital tools that we develop in that project will be adapted to other areas in which we are working along the Green Connection. We've already begun at a number of locations. Under the Mevlana Viaduct, a 'forgotten' concrete bridge at the north end of the Green Connection, citizens explored the space through sound and an opera performance. This resulted in new impulses for rethinking the space. In Schiemond, a neighbourhood of mostly social housing at the southern edge of the Green Connection, we organised a conference. A series of artistic activities helped residents share stories and generate ideas. In the M4H harbour, we began planning a Photovoice process to support the 'green first' approach of transforming former industrial lands into a new neighbourhood.

The Green Team is a diverse group of residents who want to take action in public space while strengthening local networks. They aim to strengthen the bond between residents and greenery against a background of self-development. Activities include building facade gardens, planting bulbs and maintaining greenery. We are developing ways for ParticipArt methods to support collection of data from the Green Team. This provides feedback for local policies. It also provides a means for the team to measure and share the impact of their work, especially on society and health. Communicating this impact is important for accessing structural financing.

Another major project is the redevelopment of Oostervant, a neighbourhood of mostly social housing in the neighbourhood of Middelland in Rotterdam West. Many of the homes are in poor repair and need to be replaced. The public space and sports facilities, which are popular with youth from all over the city, will also be renewed. We're developing approaches for ParticipArt methods to support a youth-led approach for the neighbourhood to take the lead in these processes.

We are also supporting Wijkbedrijf de Middellander. That's a new form of neighbourhood social enterprise owned by the neighbourhood through shares. It creates value in the neighbourhood through co-creation: clean and safe streets, more jobs, more green and healthier residents. We're exploring how ParticipArt methods can help de Middellander collect stories and data, especially from neighbourhood youth, in order to plan activities and set priorities. In turn, the Middellander helps organise structural financing to support methods. It is also the vehicle for organising neighbourhood digital tools like the ParticipArt app.

ParticipArt Innovation: Culture Cooperation Delfshaven
Culture Cooperation Delfshaven is a new neighbourhood-led organisation in Rotterdam West that grew out of Urban ParticipArt. We believe in the power of art to make living together easier and to support neighbourhood action. That's in themes as diverse as health care, urban planning, sustainability and local economy. One of the tasks of Culture Cooperation is to embed ParticipArt methods and digital tools in the neighbourhood. Although we focus on the neighbourhood of Delfshaven, the structure is replicable elsewhere.

The organisation has three pillars. The first is networking and matchmaking. That's about matching local cultural experts to urban professionals to support specific co-creation projects. We also match artists to spaces for performance or production. The second pillar is co-creation. We promote arts as a method for collaboration between different social sectors and supporting neighbourhood resilience, offering solutions for mobilising citizens, collecting data and generating ideas. The third pillar is space & infrastructure. We are busy securing physical spaces for local cultural hubs, in partnership with other local organisations. These hubs will serve as a place of production, collaboration and experimentation, and as open places where residents can get in touch with participatory arts methods. This space extends online, to neighbourhood digital infrastructure.

Culture Cooperation is still in its early days. We are structuring it as an independent membership organisation that local cultural institutions, companies or individuals can join. Members elect a management board for decision-making. The business model will be based on a mix of membership contributions, co-creation projects and research grants. We are also investigating possibilities for structural financing from financial streams in other themes we contribute to, like social & health, and building data partnerships with the city and other partners.

Action Plan Rotterdam: Oostervant & the Heemraadssingel

In Rotterdam, we focus our action plan for the next steps of ParticipArt on two concrete projects in Delfshaven, along the eastern edge of the Green Connection. The first is the Heemraadssingel, a 1.5 km green waterway. It's one of the city's most beautiful spaces, with 19th century villas providing a stunning backdrop. The waterway is not only popular with those living alongside it, but also those in the more affordable side streets. We've begun a process called Who Owns the Heemraadssingel? in order to support a new vision and plan for the singel's future. Tensions are coming to the surface: is it a quiet place for nature, or a place for activities? How to deal with drug dealing and homelessness? And who should get to decide on how the singel is used: those living next to it, or everyone who uses it? We are working with neighbourhood residents, the city and other organisations to build a process where all voices are heard.

Photo: The Heemraadssingel is a 19th century waterway and one of the most beautiful green spaces in Rotterdam.

Oostervant is a lively neighbourhood. There are around 300 residents from diverse cultural backgrounds, like Turkey, Morocco and The Netherlands. There is a wide mix of families & single, young & old. Some have lived here for a long time and most live on a low income. At the centre of the neighbourhood there is a recreation centre with a swimming pool, along with sports fields that are very popular with youth from all over the city. Property prices in the surroundings have skyrocketed in recent years as the area gentrifies and wealthier residents move in. The social housing agency is working on a plan to improve the decrepit homes. The city wants to improve the recreation centre and public spaces. We are supporting a process that makes the voices of citizens heard and give their input on Oostervant's future so that it remains a neighbourhood for everyone.

In both the Heemraadssingel and Oostervant, our interventions will centre on digitally-supported ParticipArt methods. That will help us engage a wide range of residents, especially youth and marginalised groups, and to collect feedback and data on citizen perspectives & wishes. These major projects will also be one of the first practical urban co-creation projects with Culture Cooperation Delfshaven (see text box previous page), a new citizen-led organisation intended to promote arts as a means for supporting projects in the district and conducting participatory data collection.

Budapest Community of Practice
> ProProgressione

Urban ParticipArt's Budapest Community of Practice is led by Pro Progressione (PP). PP is an artistic hub that connects people, professions and ambitions by designing international collaborations in the field of culture. Within ParticipArt, it specialises in communicating the stories, ideas and results that youth have for shaping their urban environment.

PP's experience especially lies in digital storytelling, at the junction of participatory arts, communication and digital technology. This includes development of various methods of site-specific theater adventure games with youth. PP has honed these techniques in European collaborations over the years.

It's main test site is the project Szabihíd, a multidisciplinary community event in the area around Budapest's Liberty Bridge, along the Danube River.
In Hungary, participatory decision-making in urban projects is still a very marginal practice. This is true for many other countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Our goal with Urban ParticipArt is to facilitate and propagate methods of participatory processes that will especially be an example for the region. That's a process involving the citizens who use urban spaces, professionals who shape those spaces and decision-makers who control the resources necessary to shape and maintain those spaces.

On the following pages we outline the three tools that the Budapest Community of Practice shared in Urban ParticipArt as part of the research phase. We also summarise the urban context in which we work and our upcoming initiatives.

Photo opposite page: Budapest residents take over the Liberty Bridge in Budapest during Szabihíd.

A snapshot of Szabihíd in action in Budapest.

Play! Mobile

The starting point of Play! MOBILE is that art should be accessible to everyone, including those outside main cultural hubs. We specifically offered a solution for cultural participation in European micro regions.

Approach

A diverse group of professionals developed a participatory game with locals in a series of European settlements. In each, we created a playground of contemporary art. The lighting on six luminous tents was linked to sounds in the surroundings, like the chirping of crickets and the whispers of people passing by. Night cameras inside the tents made bizarre, modified pictures of visitors. This was used as a canvas for projection by local participants. Each game was also supported by a modifiable, site-specific installation.

Extra value for urban projects

The result was a method for participation and capacity building with new, harder-to-reach audiences. The format and game showed a modular way to share art while leaving space for the unique character and potential of each location to shine. Digital technology and art served as both a medium and an artistic tool to launch a process and initiate discussion on topics concerning participants and the urban environment.

Tips

Initiatives like Play! MOBILE are most successful when facilitators have a good understanding of the place and its history and have gained the trust of local communities. That usually means an extensive research period before the project, including site visits and formal & informal meetings with locals. We also highly recommend aiming for a mix of young and old participants. Youth often provide more of the energy & fresh ideas, while older generations often provide a wealth of knowledge and stories about the community.

Urban ParticipArt app

In future versions of Play! MOBILE, we will explore the possibility to upload digital artworks and information in the ParticipArt app. This will provide more visibility for the project and more flexibility for participants to connect. The app could also be used to connect site-specific installations with those in other parts of the city through digital storytelling. Together this would provide a wider urban snapshot and mutual learnings between settlements. The app could also be used to collect ideas and feedback from participants for similar installations.

Further resources

Visit the Play! Mobile website: http://www.playmobile.eu/

Photo: Performances of Play! Mobile in a village in Hungary, collaboratively planned and designed with residents.

How To Disappear Completely

'How to disappear Completely' is a fictional story that users listen to on an app while walking in the city. The app plays a short audio chapter each time a user reaches preset locations. The spoken words are linked to streets, buildings, alleys or other urban places. Because the narrative is not linear, the experience more closely resembles an open world exploration game than an audiobook. The result of this blurring of fiction and reality is that the real urban spaces transform into the background of the story and real pedestrians become actors in the story.

Approach

Our starting point was a storyline based around the mystery of disappearing people as the basis for our tour. Other storylines can be written or they can be borrowed from existing poetry or literature. The next step was to develop additional local content to support the main storyline. We do that with volunteers in workshops. The first part is 2 or 3 days of urban research and the second part is 2 days of writing. We do this with 4 to 12 people, each attending at least one of the two parts entirely. During the workshop, participants select urban locations that match the storyline. They also write new chapters, inspired by characteristics of the chosen locations and within the predetermined framework. During the workshop, participants also learn the method of procedural writing. The content is then recorded and uploaded to the app.

Extra value for urban projects

The fictional setup guides us in realising the truth of each of the diverse narratives of a neighbourhood or place. Everyone's interpretation is different, influenced by age, gender or cultural background, so this is a useful way to explore those differences and the way these meanings transform space. The immersive and sensory aspects are also a powerful way of feeling deeper layers of a city.

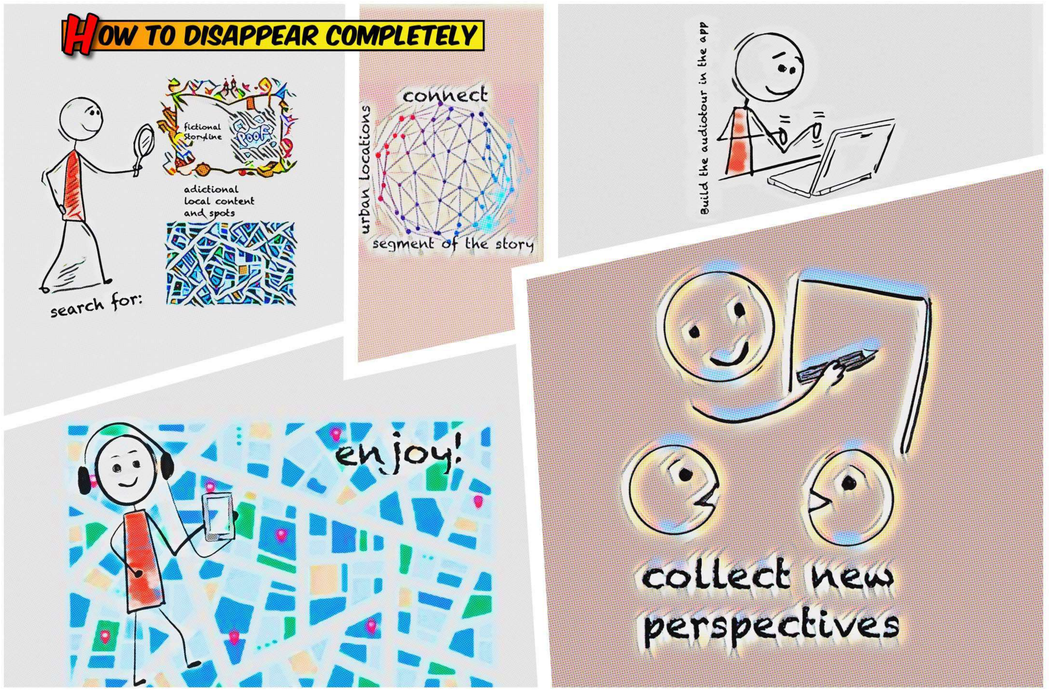
The projection of a fictional story on the urban landscape is a great way to explore the dreams and ambitions of youth for their community and city. Recently we experimented with integrating live performance with the audio story in order to enhance the experience and interaction with the city. We are also exploring other possibilities for users to interact with the story—rather than only as an audience—as a means to gather feedback, ideas and data to fuel urban processes.

Tips

The workshop format requires a lot of commitment from participants, so leave enough time for mobilisation and be clear up front about the time commitment. One of the biggest challenges with an audio tour is in promoting it to users, also over the long term. It may help to launch it at festivals or larger events so that it can spread word-of-mouth.

Urban ParticipArt app

We currently use the iZi.travel and Echoes app for immersive tours. To overcome functional limitations, we're building functionality in the ParticipArt app for immersive stories. We also aim to take a further step by introducing possibilities for listeners to provide feedback or reflections, through text, audio, photos or video, or placing and manipulating 3D objects in an augmented reality to support design ideas. We are also exploring using 3D adjusted sounds to further blur fiction and reality.



Journey to the Beginnings

Journey to the Beginnings was a collaborative project to rediscover and promote the cultural heritage of prehistoric civilisations that lived along the river Danube. We used selected prehistoric sites as a source of inspiration for contemporary arts and new technologies. The result was a new interpretive infrastructure for the sites and a closer connection between the 21st century visitor and their cultural heritage.

Approach

The project was cross-sectoral collaboration between archaeologists, museum professionals, contemporary artists and IT experts. The outcome was two-fold. Festivals at each prehistoric site used live performances to celebrate the cultural heritage. We also produced a complex Augmented and Virtual Reality-based app. This offered a sustainable interpretive infrastructure to improve the visitor experience. The app was a prehistoric video game to be played with a live theatre adventure game. During this game, actors and participants together travelled to the beginning of time with the help of augmented reality. Their challenge was to find a modern gadget left behind in order to correct a mistake committed by an archaeologist.

Extra value for urban projects

The project framework and method is relevant for urban cultural heritage sites. That's especially useful for connecting urban youth to heritage long buried under contemporary urban fabric. Based on our experience, the festival plus digital game format is more attractive to a diversity of visitors than a typical historical museum. The format could also be adapted for different kinds of urban storytelling. Role playing with actors is also a great way to think together with participants about their community and environment.

Tips

The essential starting point for an immersive project like Journey to the Beginnings is knowing your audience. It's also necessary to have a clear purpose, for example: telling the story of neighbourhood entrepreneurs, gathering ideas to improve a square, or connecting a former culture with today's world. The answers to such questions should be at the heart of chosen methodologies and forms. Also, bringing together experts and artists from completely different disciplines to create a true collaboration can be challenging. Take your time to experiment with ways to ignite fruitful dialogues.

Urban ParticipArt app

We built a separate app for this format. However, there are possibilities to link that to the ParticipArt app, or to build the same features into the ParticipArt app. The augmented and virtual reality tools would be especially relevant as a means to help users travel back or forward in time in relation to a particular urban space or community.

Further resources

Visit the Journey to the Beginnings website: http://journeytothebeginnings.eu/

Photo: A scene from the project Journey to the Beginnings.

Urban Context: Danube Riverbank, Budapest

In Budapest, one of the biggest dreams of locals is to transform their river, the Danube, which crosses the entire city. This desire has been confirmed through previous collaborations and initiatives, like RIVE, DunaPest and Szabihíd[5]. The aim is to take space away from car traffic and parking and transform it into a more natural place that citizens can enjoy without the smell and noise of traffic. To support this ambition, we have a long-standing collaboration with VALYO (City and River Association), a bottom-up movement aiming to bring community life and arts to the banks of the Danube. Their initiatives turned empty spaces near the river - including even the Liberty Bridge - into meeting places where citizens can relax, recharge and create. These annual events were incredibly popular among citizens.

With our initiatives - now expanded by Urban ParticipArt - we are aiming to provide a platform and tools for citizens to more effectively voice their ideas for how the city and its public spaces could develop. That especially includes youth and those with fewer opportunities. The result is the tools to support a process in which everyone feels welcome to contribute ideas, wishes and initiatives toward a new citizen-led plan for the Danube. These results will be communicated to the decision-makers of the city so that our rivers and other public spaces become truly common spaces for everyone.

Photo opposite page: One of many performances during the Szabihíd event on the Liberty Bridge in Budapest.
[5] For more information on Szabihíd see: https://www.szabihid.hu/en/

Upcoming initiatives

Our long-established collaboration with VALYO (City and River Association) continues as we co-organise Szabihíd, the annual closing down of the famous Liberty Bridge. The name refers to the nickname of the Liberty Bridge and also the Hungarian word 'holiday, day off'. The project began in 2017, when the bridge was closed due to the reconstruction of the tram line that crosses it. Although the bridge pillars were already frequently used as a meeting space, these weeks of construction provided citizens the chance to explore the bridge in new ways. The bridge became a square above the river, a theatre, a circus, a chilling area, a concert hall, and a meeting place for friends, family and strangers. People also brought instruments and art to share with others.

Pro Progressione and VALYO continue Szabihíd each summer in order to build new audiences, encourage people of different backgrounds to meet and let Budapest inhabitants use the space in ways that they choose. In recent years we faced challenges in organising the programme, as the municipality did not support bottom-up initiatives. Despite the obstacles we managed to organise Szabihíd every year except 2020 (due to the global pandemic). The popularity of cultural and artistic events has demonstrated the need for this platform. With Urban ParticipArt, we aim to show increasingly tangible results, thereby convincing decision- and policy-makers about the importance of Szabihíd and similar initiatives.

In addition to Szabihíd, we are currently developing a project called 'Livin' the City – (E) merging Parallel Realities'. This is an international collaboration between initiators of innovative, socially-engaged art practices from around Europe. An artistic city walk consisting of various site-specific creations linked by one narrative will take place simultaneously in all partner countries. Digital technology and augmented reality will support the experience. The event will be driven by local communities, with the intention of bridging gaps between locals & internationals, people & spaces, citizens & arts.

The collaboration between cities will provide audiences with a surreal participatory play and a travel through European space, tied together by a story of migrating cities. This will introduce the audience to a more active way of perceiving the stories, events and details around them. In this way, art will be used as a means to reveal the potential of spaces and reinterpret its function. The intended outcome is a reinvention of these public spaces and increased awareness for urban transformation and urgent societal challenges. By taking art out of the traditional theatre space and into public spaces, we aim to reach a broader audience. We will also provide a platform for artists, local residents, academics and policy-makers in sharing best practices in arts-driven participation and dialoguing around urgent social questions.

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Photo: ProProgressione has been working on the Danube for years. The Rivers of Europe boat, for example, stopped in 18 locations along the Danube with the aim of spreading a message of integration through art, music and dance.

Action Plan Budapest: Danube River Coalition

The aim of the Danube River coalition is to connect locals who use the spaces around the river with urban professionals working in the area, like planners, architects, policy- and decision-makers, delegates of relevant NGOs and associations and site-specific artists. The platform would provide a means for them to share their challenges and ideas on how they could develop the city. Our short-term goal is to introduce these local actors to each other. Despite their diverse backgrounds and expertise, the common ground will be their motivation to improve the urban environment and their complementary skills. Our long-term goal is to create a network that effectively function and develop independently, led by its members.

The Danube River Coalition will kick off with a congress informing our participants about the idea and goals of Urban ParticipArt, including a practical introduction to the ParticipArt app. Participants would also have the opportunity to introduce their work and their motivation for participating in the initiative. Potential collaborators include associations and bottom-up initiatives (VALYO – City and River Association, H52), artistic collectives (Kővágóörsi Alkotótábor, HelloWood), site-specific initiatives (PLACCC Festival, Ziggurat Project) municipalities, urban planners, architects, digital technology experts, artists and individuals with specific expertise.

The event will continue with a hackathon. Participants will be organised in small groups with diverse expertise. Each group will tackle a specific case in the cities we got to know during Urban ParticipArt. The case might be a problem or a desire rooted in the neighbourhood. Groups will be challenged to develop different scenarios to address the case. That's not about offering solutions, but developing a participatory experience for the community. In this way, neighbourhood residents will be invited to act as protagonists of their own story. During the event participants will be able to consult other groups and receive more information (testimonies from neighbours, documents, photos, audios). They may also have an on- or offline tour in the neighbourhood.. At the end of the hackathon, the groups will present their experience in a practical way to other participants with the help of the ParticipArt app. After the presentations, everyone will be invited to give feedback to the other groups. It will also be possible to discuss possible collaborations and ways of applying the methods and app of Urban ParticipArt. Our goal with this hackathon is not only to offer a platform for everyone interested in shaping their city's living environment, but also to create a breeding ground for new ideas and initiatives to emerge. In this way, Urban ParticipArt enables Budapest residents to actively shape their own cities and lives.

Urban ParticipArt in the Field

The concept of applying participatory arts to the urban field is often immediately attractive to professionals. Arts is associated with freedom, creativity and expression. It sounds easy: citizens are guided to create a theatre performance, take photos, dance or sing in order to spontaneously release content that is useful for our urban process! What's often overlooked is the trial & error, discipline, repetition, rationality and sweat behind an artistic product.

In our experience, the ride is worth it. Urban ParticipArt methods add extra value to professionals in the field. They offer artistic professionals possibilities to apply their craft in a socially-engaged way. They offer urban professionals inclusive methods to engage citizens and innovate in their projects. ParticipArt methods also generate rich data, especially when combined with the use of digital tools. This extra value is elaborated below.

Extra value for arts professionals

Arts professionals are often under major pressure. The creative process not only takes a lot of time & energy, but income is often low and unstable. This is especially true for artists who work in communities or for societal aims. They often depend on grants, whether from government, private or non-profit sources. Jumping from grant to grant is hard work and is almost always underpaid.

One of the main offers of ParticipArt to arts professionals is the chance to access new sources of revenue, outside the traditional grant circuit. In some countries, artists with the skills to work in neighbourhoods are increasingly being asked to support community building, urban planning and other neighbourhood projects. This isn't just a passing trend, but part of the broader paradigm shift in society toward neighbourhood-driven public services. This means more tasks for professionals with expertise suitable for the neighbourhood level. That includes a need for creative professionals with expertise in participation-related tasks, like mobilising & engaging citizens, telling the story of a community and generating new ideas. With the rise of big data in urban projects, it's becoming increasingly important to mobilise citizens and gather data. That especially includes stories and other forms of personal & experiential data, which artists can support.

In addition to new revenue, ParticipArt approaches also offer less tangible benefits. Many artists want their art to have a broader impact on society, and supporting urbanistic processes and other neighbourhood goals is one of many ways to do this. Some artists especially enjoy working with communities because of the chances for personal learning. Neighbourhood work brings them into contact with a diversity of actors and situations they might not normally encounter, or they feel privileged to experience firsthand the creative potential we all have. Finally, it may also be exciting to be part of new innovations related to the paradigm shift toward neighbourhoods. Although these

Photo: Multimedia live performance at OT301 Radio. Artists: Maria Mavridou (dance) and Mirko Lazovic (visuals), Pierre Mollet(lights).

are real benefits, they should always be seens as the 'cherry on top' for artists working in the urban context, who deserve fair financial compensation for their contribution to society.

Extra value for urban professionals

Today's urban planners are increasingly using novel participatory approaches in order to engage the knowledge & power of citizens, who know their neighbourhoods and their needs best. The result is not only empowered citizens, but also better urban projects that serve the people who actually live, work and play in these urban spaces.

Despite increased attention to participatory urban processes, youth are often marginalised. That's especially true for vulnerable youth with a low education, living in poverty or from a minority cultural background. This is partly because urban professionals often overlook youth when reaching out to citizens. It's more common to focus on more established 'players' like heads of neighbourhood associations, local business owners or experts from social organisations. For many youth, the structure and content of participatory processes can be intimidating. Overly-formal processes, language gaps, cultural differences, highly-politicised atmospheres and methods that don't suit the interests & skills of youth. The result is that the voices of youth are often not heard in co-creation projects, even though they use urban spaces as much as other citizens.

Urban ParticipArt methods bring extra value to urban projects in three main ways.

The first is more inclusive processes. The best urban plans involve a representative group, beyond the 'usual suspects'. In our experience, Urban ParticipArt methods attract a wide group of participants that are often harder to reach, especially youth. That's because art methods are accessible to a range of people and skill sets. They're also attractive simply because it's fun to collaborate and create with others. An example is our PlayMobile! method, in which we brought site-specific theatre to settlements in European micro regions. By building it with local youth and taking inspiration from the surrounding environment, we attracted a wide range of people who are normally difficult to reach.

Photo opposite page: Residents exploring the Mevlana Viaduct through sound and movement as part of Rotterdam Opera Days.

Second is the variety of data. Good planning and community building depends on gathering good data. The data that is usually most readily available and easy to collect & analyse is quantitative. It's harder to collect the experiential and personal data, like stories, dreams and sensations. Urban ParticipArt methods are an effective means for gathering this type of data. The digital tools we are developing are intended to also support the analysis and communication of this type of data. The project to renew the Heemraadssingel in Rotterdam is a great example. The city had lots of quantitative data available. The photo stories we collected with citizens complemented that with a wealth of experiential data. With artistic processes, it's therefore possible for urban professionals to go beyond functionality, necessity and logic of formal processes.

Third is an atmosphere that promotes innovation. We get more and better ideas not through intellectual discussion, but when we are open and playful. In this state, we are primed for new perspectives and available for spontaneity. Urban ParticipArt methods take us beyond our usual cognitive mindset, providing the conditions for this state of 'flow'. An example is the soundscapes and operas we carried out under the Mevlana Viaduct. Our activities were simple and sometimes rather silly. But the results were astounding: besides the laughter and the new friends generated, a host of concrete new ideas for the area emerged.

Fourth is the possibility for empowerment. Since Urban ParticipArt methods are accessible for anyone, they teach us through experience that creativity is not the preserve of artists or urban professionals. Everyone can create, and the ideas of citizens are a valid part of the process. This was especially visible in the Winter Lights community event in Barcelona. Participating citizens didn't just act out a script given to them: they wrote the script. Most had never thought themselves capable.

Fifth is the potential to communicate powerfully. Most of our judgments are actually made in a split second, before we're aware. That's why while texts and maps have a role in communicating urban projects, a powerful image, video or poem can move us faster and deeper. This is important in today's society, where we're bombarded with information. Powerful communication is also important for attracting attention from media or politicians, who can be essential players in co-creation projects. The excellent guide Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for Revolution[6] outlines dozens of ways that citizen activists can use the arts to more effectively draw attention to their cause.

[6] Andrew Boyd (20212). Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for Revolution. OR Books: London.

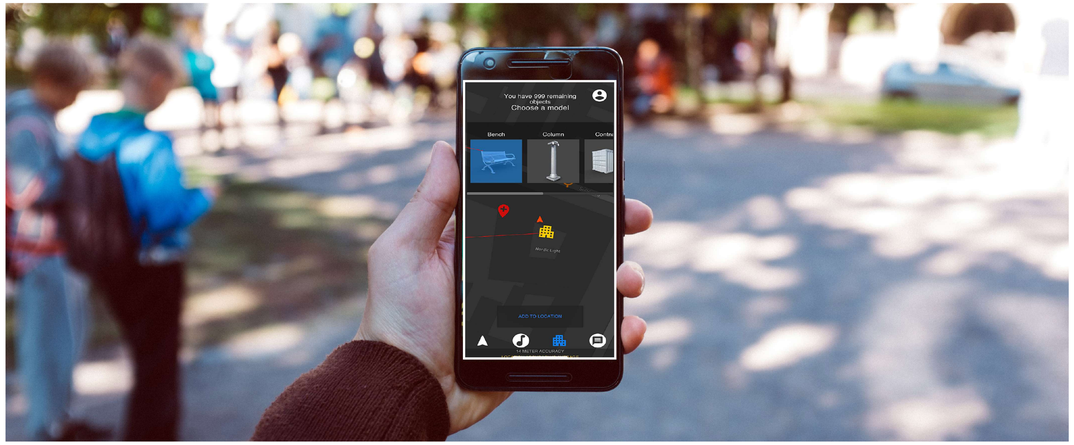
Digital Tools & Data in ParticipArt

Urban ParticipArt at its core can be seen as a set of participatory methods for collecting urban data. This data is the fuel for neighbourhood co-creation and decision-making. Data collection has always been an important basis for planning urban initiatives. That data is typically quantitative or in the form of surveys or maps. The extra value of ParticipArt is to focus on qualitative data, like stories, sensory experiences, memories and dreams for the future of a neighbourhood. This kind of data is often more difficult for urban professionals to collect since it's not usually part of their training. It can also be difficult to analyse, especially because they can be in diverse formats like images, audio, video or performance. The need for support in organising data collection & analysis is one of the major reasons we're developing digital support tools.

Pro Progressione took the initiative to develop the Urban ParticipArt app, our first support tool for participatory arts-based urban work. It enables communities to see and approach their surroundings more playfully. That includes initiating urban planning processes, creating site-specific performances, or playing games like a remote scavenger hunt. In this way, citizens are invited to change, plan and get in contact with the spaces of their everyday lives. By leaving traces and messages, they can also interact with neighbours and share ideas for their living environment. Professionals can also use it to get specific feedback from citizens. In this way, we can think, research and play together in urban spaces—to walk our own way, while remaining connected through a common platform.

The app is currently in try-out form, offering flexibility to develop further as needs arise. Existing technical features include the possibility for users to submit subjective impressions or ideas in the form of audio, video, image and text. The app also tracks user locations so that each impression can be linked with specific locations and so that user routes can be mapped. Together, this data forms the basis for a collective analysis or vision for a particular space. Administrators have the possibility to preset walking routes by attaching texts, prerecorded audio, or even 3D objects to specific locations. In this way, administrators can not only share content with users, but also collect user-produced content. We are also building features so that users can share content directly with other users.

In the future, we will add functions that allow users to create urban games, like treasure hunts, escape rooms or interactive tours. We are also exploring integration of virtual and augmented reality to support gaming and exploration of interventions in urban spaces, like new trees or buildings or playground equipment. Future augmented reality features, integrated with 3D modelling, will also be used to support more immersive experiences and imagining new spaces. 3D sounds will enhance the experience of walking in urban spaces.



Home of Participation is collaborating with other Rotterdam partners to develop a scalable digital platform and data system for neighbourhoods. These digital tools will support community building and co-creation. They also help measure impact and generate essential data for communities & policy makers. The ParticipArt app is being integrated as a key part of this system. Furthermore, ParticipArt methods will be used offline to collect data, like stories and wishes, to support neighbourhood projects and decision-making. One of the unique features of the system is that data will be owned and managed by neighbourhoods. This puts information and power in the hands of citizens. In order to develop this ambitious initiative, we've built partnerships between ParticipArt and other teams, locally and throughout Europe.

Photo: Testing of the ParticipArt app in a neighbourhood planning project.

Joint Action & Dissemination

This toolkit is the first production from the Urban ParticipArt collaboration, supported by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. Through the project, the partners exchanged best practices & methods, innovated together and got to know each other professionally.

Although the grant period is over, we've already begun working to take ParticipArt further. That begins with applying and testing methods with youth in urban projects in our cities, as outlined in the three Action Plans in this toolkit. We've also already had numerous requests from partners in other cities, inside and outside Europe, to share our expertise in their urban projects. This is inspiring for us, as it shows the need and potential for our work. We are continuing to disseminate Urban ParticipArt at international congresses, festivals and events, while building partnerships with research institutions to study the impact and effectiveness of ParticipArt methods.

Our next steps also include a special focus on developing the ParticipArt app into a full tool for arts-based participation in cities. Although our collaboration didn't originally envision an app, our experience in the field revealed the need for it. In fact, we now see the app and its intended features as perhaps even the core innovation of ParticipArt. Future steps in the project will also include offline support tools, like card games, for building specific skills or conducting specific activities relevant for urban work.

We also intend to further build the Urban ParticipArt website as a portal to inspire citizens, government and professionals to apply participatory arts methods in their projects. We will not only share our methods and experiences on the website, but invite others to share theirs. In this way, we contribute to a growing body of open source knowledge.

On the following pages we are excited to present three new methods, called ParticipArt Tools, that we began developing during this collaboration. Stay updated by checking our website and social media, as we will continue to develop and test these and other tools.

ParticipArt Tool 1: Ikigai

ParticipArt Tool 2: Performing Utopia

ParticipArt Tool 3: Shadows United

ParticipArt Tool 1: Ikigai

Ikigai is the reason you get up in the morning.

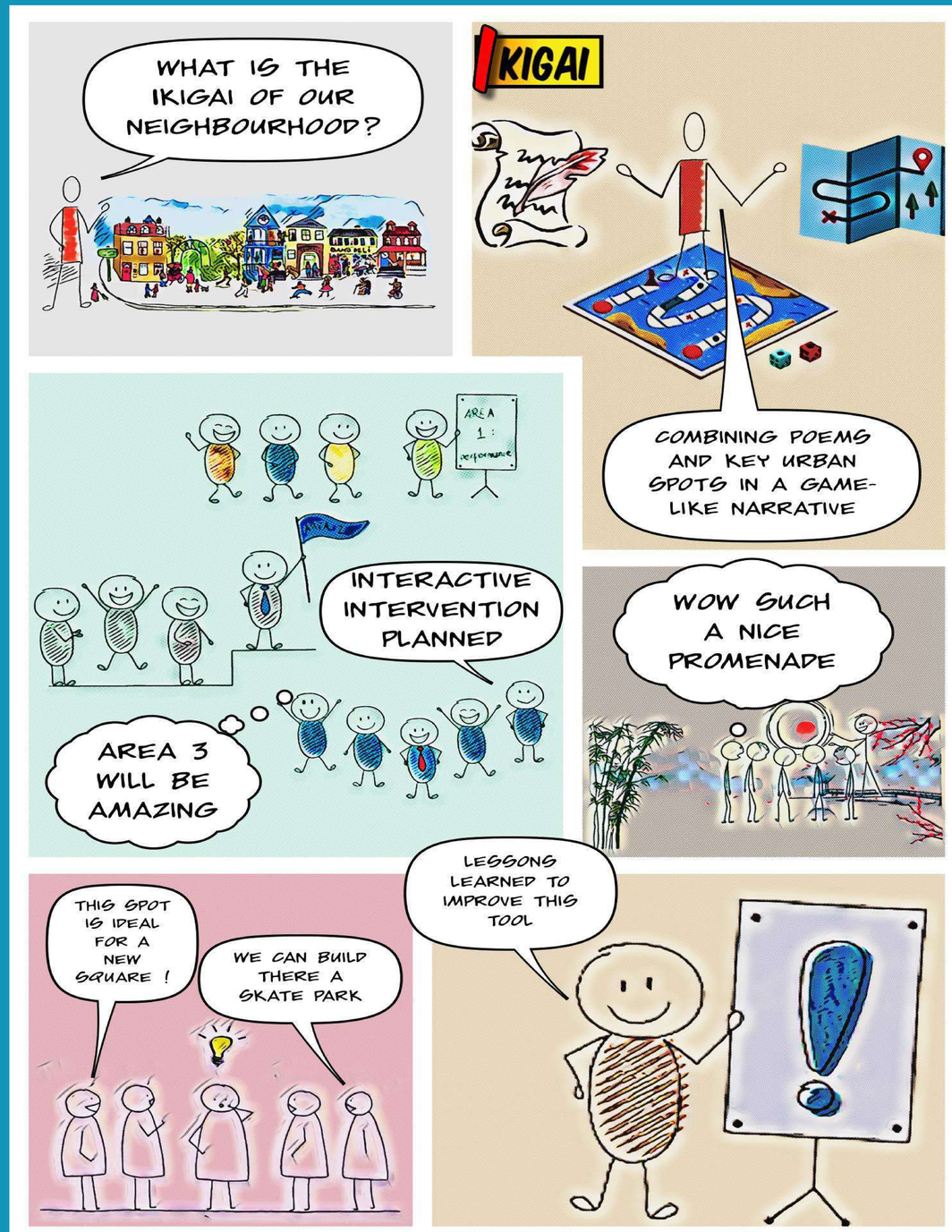
In Japanese culture, Ikigai refers to the reason one is an individual. It also points to the source of the value of life, or what makes it worth living. Ikigai refers to both the present and the future, particularly by supporting identification of a goal or project that can be a source of happiness. The question we pose: what is the Ikigai of a neighborhood?

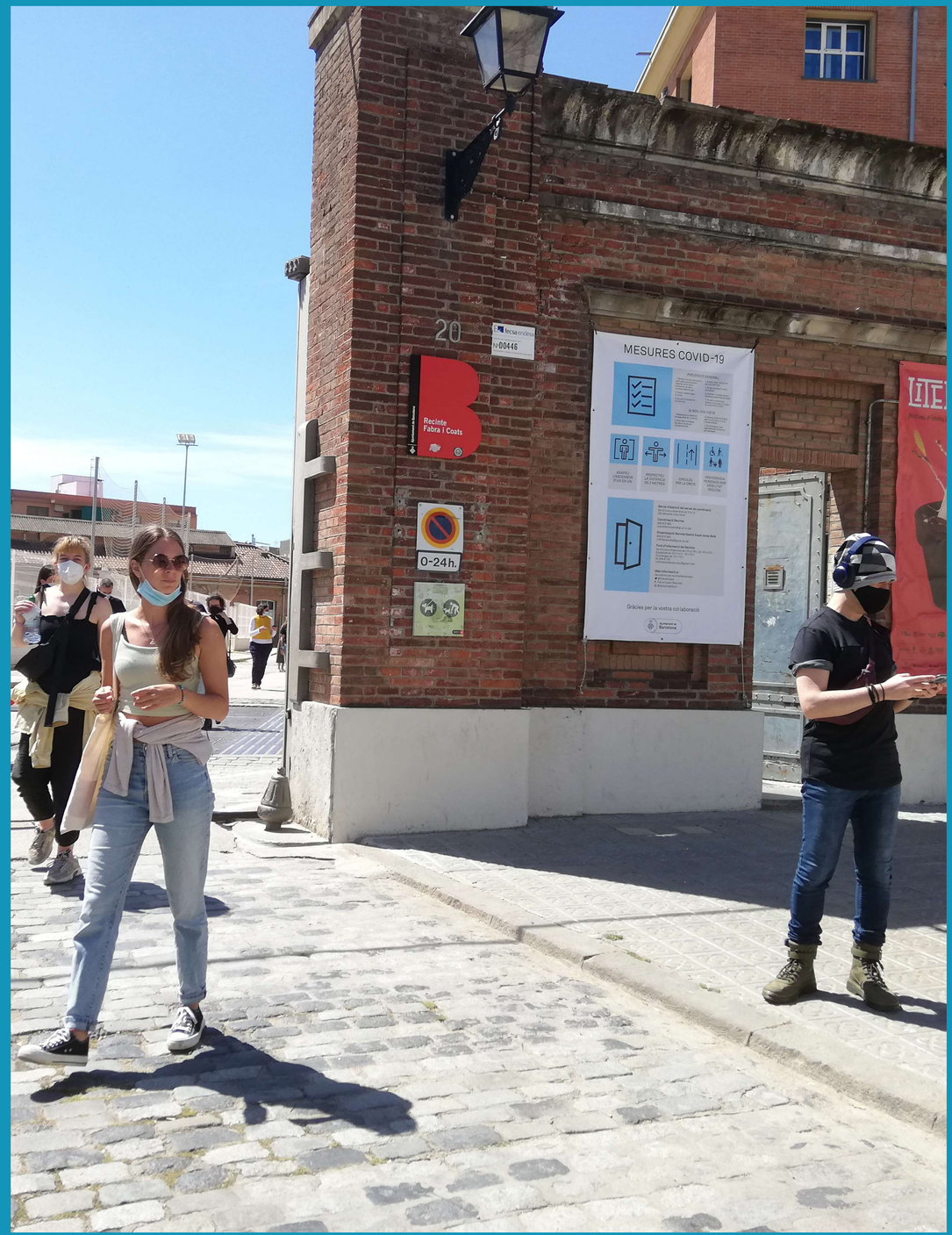
Through our Ikigai tool, we invite neighbourhood residents to experience their urban context through a game-like narrative. We begin by choosing a story to serve as a framework. Residents then join us in creating additional content about their community or selected urban spaces. The results are recorded and uploaded to an app as a series of audio fragments. A fragment automatically plays when app users arrive at specific locations. This is combined with live performances at the locations. The result is a sensory and artistic promenade tour through a space or neighbourhood.

In short, the Ikigai workshop connects urban intervention and multimedia narrative. That's an opportunity to use performing arts and digital tools for urban exploration and mapping. It is a way to create new routes and experience a neighborhood from another perspective. The workshop format offers residents a chance to share their stories about urban locations and people. The app together with performances stimulate us to experience the city in different ways, whether exploring, looking with different eyes, focusing on a certain topic, criticising, or sharing problems.

How to do it

Below is the process we followed to create the Ikigai experience at a festival in Barcelona, including a 2.5-hour workshop with residents on location. The process is divided in three parts: pre-workshop, workshop and post-workshop. Since we had limited time with workshop participants, we chose the basic tour route and four special locations in advance. There are numerous alternatives to this process so we encourage you to find your own best path.





1. Pre-workshop

- Decide on the aim and desired impact of the experience
- Choose a (poetic) text, an urban route and special locations along the route
- Record and edit files, then upload them to your tour on the izi. TRAVEL app

2. Workshop

- Welcome participants
- Walk with participants along the route and listen to the recorded texts at each location
- Explain workshop goals & activities and answer questions
- Divide participants into groups, one for each location on the route
- Groups develop a performance or artistic intervention with support from the organising team. The intervention could either be at their location or could be a walking intervention that connects the next location along the route. Note that new ideas from participants may require changes to the tour in the app.
- Conduct the final promenade, in which participants follow the guided audio tour including live performances by each group
- Collect feedback and reflect with participants

3. Post-workshop

- Keep in touch to hear how participants applied the learning from this method
- Use the experience and feedback to improve the methodology

References

- izi.TRAVEL app: https://izi.travel/en
- Invisible Cities by Italo Calvino
- Open Doors (see page 21) and Winter Lights (see page 19)
- How to Disappear Completely (see page 49)

Our experience

We organised a first test of Ikigai in Barcelona in May 2021 as part of the FAACCC community arts festival. We used the story of Chloe—from Invisible Cities, a book by Italo Calvino—as a framework. We cut the text in four parts and linked an audio recording of each text to four locations around the former Fabra i Coats factory.

Twenty participants then joined us for a 2.5-hour workshop. We divided them in four groups of five participants. Each was supported in planning a live performance at one location, based on their inspiration from the location and the text fragment for that location. This was also the inspiration for a small choreography or scene, which were primarily expressed through movement and presence.

Photo opposite page: Testing of the Ikigai tool in Barcelona in 2021 during a community festival.

TOOL

At the end of the workshop, everyone joined a 30-minute promenade to all four locations, listening to the audio recordings and experiencing the live performances from every group.

The four groups developed very different urban artistic interventions. The first chose a form of invisible theatre in which the participants suddenly found themselves immersed in a performance. Another group invited participants to become actors and to perform for passersby according to certain instructions. Another group prepared an interactive performance in which the participants became part of the artistic installation. The possibilities are, of course, restricted only by the imagination.

Future potential & development

The workshop and format outlined above can be developed in various directions depending on the objectives. We invite you to co-create the Ikigai tool by experimenting with different formats and technologies and sharing your experiences with us.

Technically, we use the izi.TRAVEL app to support Ikigai. Once we finish developing the ParticipArt app, we will use that since it will offer extra possibilities. For example, it will be possible to invite users to submit their own stories or reactions during the experience, pinned to specific locations. With this data it will be possible to collaboratively build a map that allows others to experience the route. This data can also support citizens or professionals in the analysis of an urban place, as the starting point of a stakeholder dialogue, or as the basis for developing urban or social interventions.

We found Calvino's story of Chloe, the text for our first test of Ikigai, to be particularly powerful. Choosing a different text would have generated different sentiments and perspectives on the same space. Similarly, choosing a different location with the same text would have given a different backdrop and therefore other meanings.

We also see possibilities to further develop Ikigai into an augmented reality game that mixes reality and fantasy. That could include virtually overlaying images and visual elements on the real urban space.

TOOL

ParticipArt Tool 2: Performing Utopia

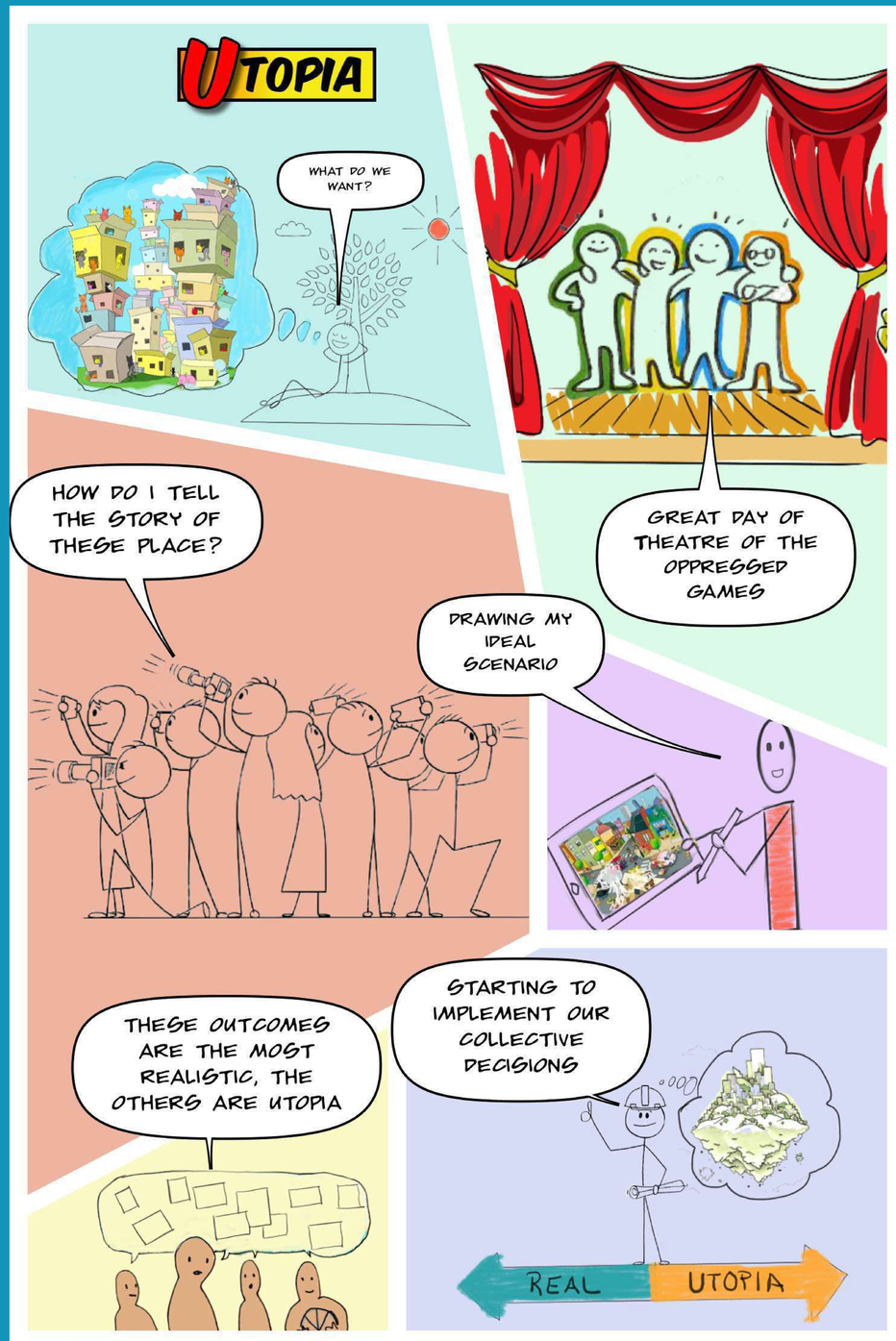
Utopia lies at the horizon.
When I draw nearer by two steps,
it retreats two steps.
If I proceed ten steps forward, it
swiftly slips ten steps ahead.
No matter how far I go, I can
never reach it.
What, then, is the purpose of
utopia?
It is to cause us to advance.

- Eduardo Galeano

Performing Utopia is intended for groups who identify with a spatial struggle. The struggle or collective challenge can be anything that negatively impacts the sense of belonging, ways of living or access. It's inspired by three main artistic methods: Theatre of the Oppressed, Photovoice and performative walking. The method is a work in progress that we continue to develop and test.

The big question in Performing Utopia: "What do we want as a community?" That's in relation to what's coming so the group can work towards a utopian outcome. These outcomes increase the group's critical sense so they can visualise the problem and potential solutions and then reach for the reachable.

Usually when we look for possible solutions to a conflict or struggle, we limit ourselves in relation to previous experiences, the complexity of the challenge and perceived resources. This can lead us to overlook valuable possible outcomes that we believe to be impossible or that we never considered. The aim of the process is to find solutions for the struggle. At the same time, the group builds cohesion and critical thinking, and a sense of belonging. Working with an ideal (utopian result) in mind stretches what the group can practically do. It can also stimulate unconventional and creative solutions. The group can later work with these via a step-by-step approach in which all participants play a role.



How to do it

The steps described below are the full process of Performing Utopia that we intended for our first test. This test has unfortunately been delayed due to the covid-19 pandemic. However we are continuing to develop this process. We also encourage you to be inspired by our process while finding your own path.

1. Introduction and Challenges
The facilitator uses participatory theatre games and exercises to get to know the group and understand the main challenges they experience in a particular space or neighbourhood. Augusto Boal's Games for Actors and Non-actors is a great resource for games. This session takes a day.

2. Story of the Place
After a brief review of the findings of the previous day, the facilitator invites the group to walk through their surroundings and take photos with their phone. Photos can be of buildings, squares, neighbourhoods, rivers, forests, roads or the community. The facilitator divides the participants in groups of 3-4 and asks them to spend an hour or two to take photos with a question in mind: 'How do I tell the story of this place?' This question inspires participants to systematise their response into photographs. In our experience, ten photos from each participant is enough. After the walk, the group gathers to discuss the experience. The photos are displayed and the participants are invited to guess the stories that others are trying to tell. The facilitator supports participants in curating ten photos per group.

3. Ideal Scenarios
Further games and discussions are used to review and elaborate the results of the previous day. The groups are then invited to review the ten selected photos. Using tablets and digital pens, they are instructed to alter the photos or draw the images with a question in mind: 'What is the ideal scenario for my place?' The aim of this session is to visually understand not only the struggles of groups, but also their ideal situation or utopia.

4. Possible outcomes
The facilitator asks all groups to display their altered photos to the others. Together they discuss how possible or impossible these suggestions are, placing them in a series ranging from what participants think can be done and what participants think is unrealistic (our utopia). The aim of this session is to close the workshop by determining what can be done and to discuss the practicalities. This stretches the boundaries of what can be done, targeting utopian outcomes, by creating alternative scenarios and solutions for collective actions.

References

- Games and exercises from Theatre of the Oppressed and Games for Actors & Non-actors by Augusto Boal
- Photovoice methodology for working with visual narratives (see page 31)
- Utopia for Realists by Rutger Bergman

Our experience

Due to the covid-19 pandemic it hasn't been possible for us to test the entire Performing Utopia process. However, we have executed certain elements. With a group at Stichting Formaat, a participatory theatre organisation in The Netherlands, we organised a series of sessions on the theme of utopia. We began each session with a search for objects and then transformed these into our notion of utopia. With our individual perception as a foundation, we then constructed the group's ideal setting. This was followed by games and exercises from Image Theatre. Each session we took one step closer to our utopia and discovered more clearly what we want from our local communities. The subjectivity of utopia and the invitation to discover what we want boosted the group's imagination and creativity.

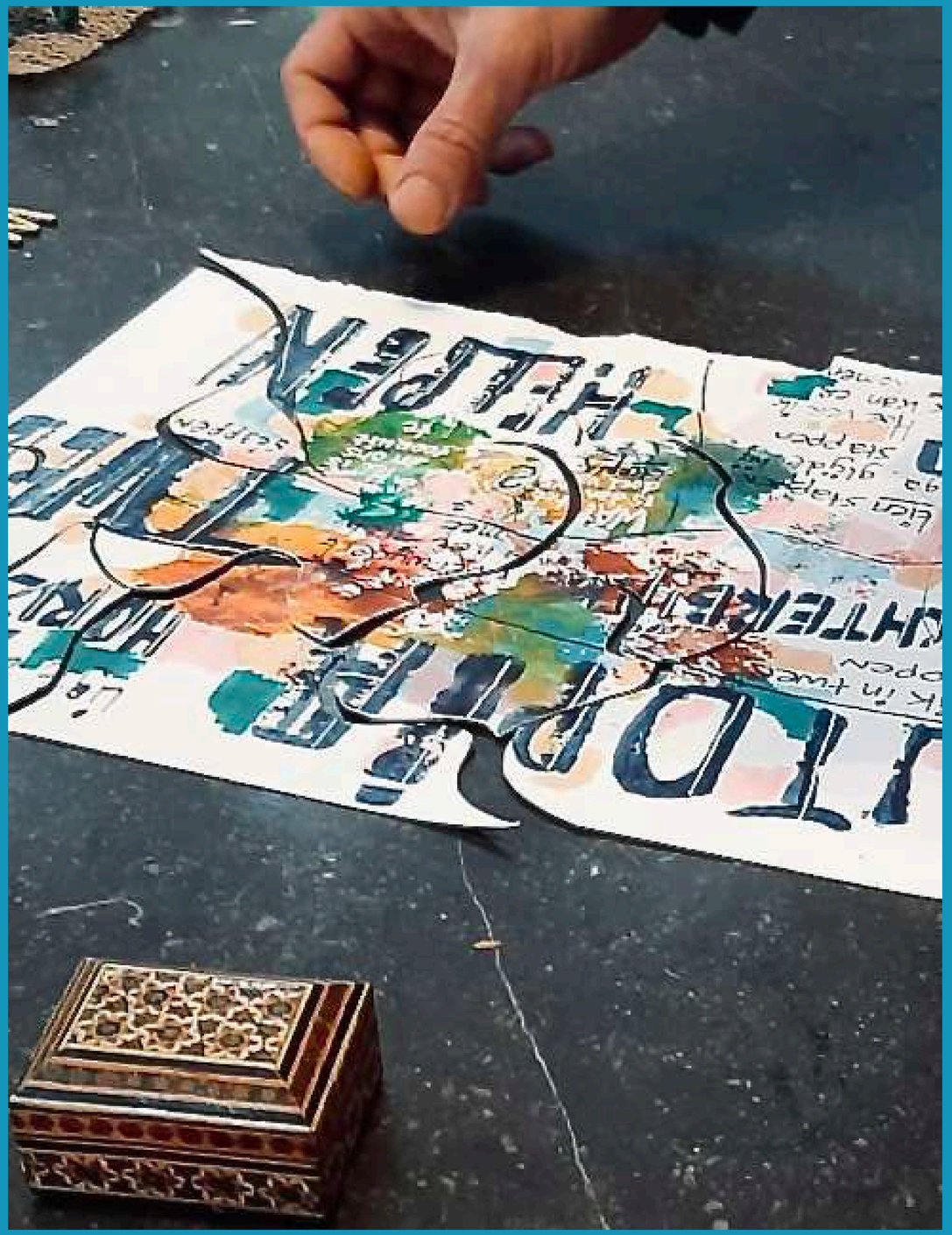
We also experimented with the concept of utopia for a workshop at Decolonising Encounters - Europe lab, from the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum. We used Photovoice to explore the concept of (de)colonisation and where we want to go using a pragmatic utopian perspective. Once again, the concept of utopia within a supportive creative structure helped participants imagine.

During our ParticipArt training session in The Netherlands, we worked on the case of Rotterdam's Proefpark de Punt, a temporary community garden that had to be moved due to housing construction. We designed possible interventions for this transfer. That included visiting the new location, taking photos and altering or drawing on them with a pen and tablet with this question in mind: what would be the ideal scenario for the new park? This was an effective way to generate new ideas.

Challenges and Potential

Further development and testing is required to refine Performing Utopia. Nevertheless, we invite you

TOOL



to be inspired and select parts that suit your situation. The starting point for our further development will be based on the successful elements that we've tested in the field so far. There are other possibilities. For example, exercises from Image Theatre could be used to define ideal scenarios. There are also many possibilities for the defining possible outcomes with photos, ranging from photoshop modifications to drawing to finding reference photos from elsewhere to combining photos with Image Theatre exercises. One of the challenges of this tool is the need for the facilitator to be familiar with diverse methodologies, from theatre to photography to digital skills. Selected exercises will therefore depend on the skills of the facilitator and participants.

A strength of Performing Utopia is the generation of visual outputs. That can be especially powerful when communicating results with citizens or with policy makers. It is also an accessible approach for marginalised youth, especially those with less ability to express themselves in formal language. A visual approach also offers extra possibilities for tackling specific spatial issues in neighbourhoods.

We also see big potential to use the ParticipArt app to enhance Performing Utopia, once the app is completed. That includes possibilities for digitally modifying photos or building joint maps. The library of 3D spatial objects, a function already in the app, can help participants develop more detailed visual outcomes quicker, without needing technical drawing skills. Augmented reality tools could also be used in many ways, for example to visually overlay images made by participants with reality, thereby allowing immersive and sensory exploration of different scenarios.

ParticipArt Tool 3: Shadows United

So . . . listen . . . since we cannot make noise, you are the one that needs to amplify our voice!

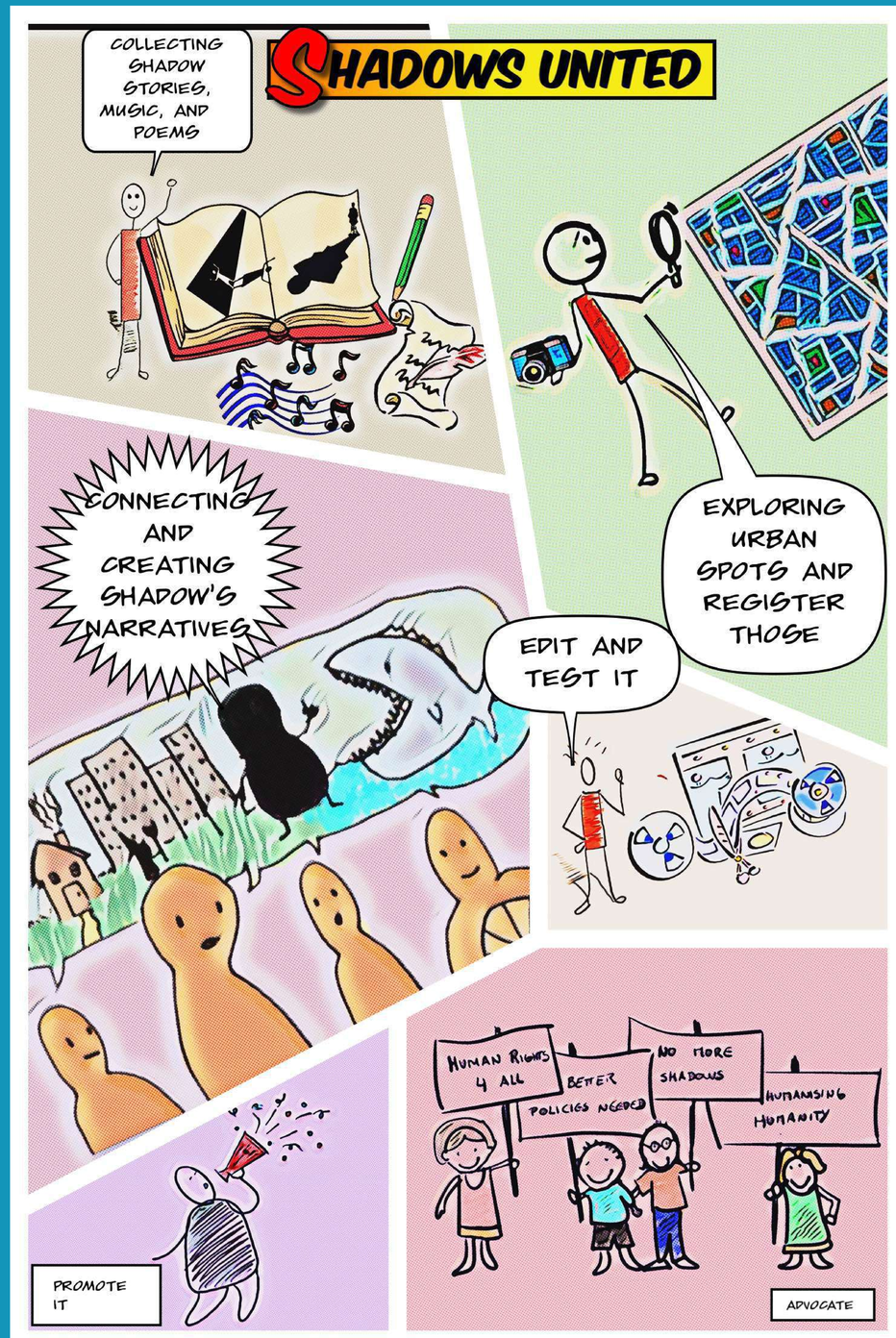
The opening screen of the Shadows United audio tour[7] reads: “If you listen carefully you can hear it: the whispered stories of invisible Rotterdammers. Plug in and amplify their voices! An unusual audio tour about courageous people.”

Shadows United is an advocacy audio tour of the Rotterdam city centre with the aim of offering locals a different perspective on their urban environment through storytelling, poetry and music. Real stories and experiences of undocumented people in the city are used as inspiration. The tour contains 25 locations along a 3.7 km route. It takes about 1.5 hours to complete.

The estimated number of undocumented people in Rotterdam is 15,000 and in Amsterdam it is 30,000. However, most citizens in those cities are unaware of their presence. Undocumented people are like shadows that we don’t notice. Moreover, being identified as undocumented by the authorities is a big risk. One can be arrested for an undetermined period of time or even deported. Thus, it is not easy for undocumented people to demand their rights.

Once the tour reveals the shadows, the user has two choices: turn away and continue on his or her existing path, or stand in solidarity. Our aim is the second. Also, we hope that when users pass by the tour locations again in the future, they may be triggered to remember the stories and renew their search for the shadows.

We created Shadows United because we believe in standing in solidarity with undocumented people and in humanising humanity. This tool was developed and tested through our partnership with Stichting Formaat, a Rotterdam-based participatory arts organisation. Through Formaat, we have collaborated with undocumented people for years, witnessing their daily struggles and lack of human rights. Shadows United is part of our advocacy campaign and an invitation to all to become allies and agents for change.



[7] Project developed by Stichting Formaat (formaat.org). Listen to the tour by downloading the izi.TRAVEL app and searching for the tour ‘Shadows United’ in Rotterdam

How to do it

We built our advocacy audio tour using the izi.TRAVEL app. Our process is described below. There are many other possibilities, however, and we encourage you to find your own way.

1. Form working group, including those we are addressing: "Nothing for undocumented, without undocumented[8]" and negotiating the aims of the final product.
2. Collecting potential content like personal stories, poetry, data & facts, memories and learnings from previous projects.
3. Exploring the neighbourhood and noting potential locations and their characteristics.
4. Developing audio content for each location. The result is a first draft of the audio tour.
5. Reevaluating the aim & strategy and making necessary adjustments to the project.
6. Recording the audio files, taking or selecting photos, editing the material and building the tour on izi.TRAVEL
7. Testing, adjusting and then launching the tour.

References

- izi.TRAVEL app: https://izi.travel/en
- Open Doors (see page 21) and Winter Lights (see page 19)
- How to Disappear Completely (see page 49)
- Shadow Museum of Stichting Formaat (August 2020) and other data collected through our work with undocumented people

Our experience

Based on feedback from participants and users, we are enthusiastic about the results of Shadows United. The main feedback we received is that connecting stories with a specific location helped participants see the city with a different perspective. More specifically, they learned to notice the presence of 'shadows' in our city and the social gaps between the shadows and mainstream society.

Most participants found the personal stories to be the most impactful part of the tour. Many users also shared that they appreciated being able to control the experience by walking between locations and deciding how much time and energy to dedicate to each location. This makes it an active performance, rather than a passive performance where one takes in information.

Photo opposite page: Anonymity is a necessity for the undocumented residents who worked with us on Shadows United.
[8] Slogan from the organisation Amsterdam City Rights

Challenges and Potential

In Shadows United we aimed to balance the dramatic moments with the joyful moments. This was to show a broad view of life as an undocumented person. We also didn't want to overwhelm participants with too many emotionally difficult stories. In our experience, the use of metaphors, humour and art are good techniques to balance the difficult parts. That's why we included many poetic texts, music and silly quotes in Shadows United.

We used the izi.TRAVEL app to organise the tour digitally. It offers possibilities for making two types of tours: a normal tour or a quest, which includes a multiple choice survey. We chose a normal tour since we preferred to leave it more open for audience interpretation.

Note that izi.TRAVEL provides opportunities to share photos, text and external links. For those without mobile internet, it is possible to download the tour in advance. That's why it's wise to start the tour near a free wifi spot. The disadvantages of the app include limited options for types of tours, lack of interactivity with users and lack of data collection opportunities. In the future, the ParticipArt app will fill these gaps. There are many ways to build a storyline in a tour like Shadows United. For this reason we recommend taking enough time to explore those possibilities and select the approach that suits your aims and skills. Be flexible as well to change it along the way; we discovered many unexpected possibilities as we worked. Also be sure to reserve enough time for production. In our experience, building the audio tour takes much more time than anticipated, especially the recording and editing of audio files.

For our next tour, we aim to take the format further by including a version of the tour with live, on-site performances, for example using techniques from Invisible Theatre. This is much more complex to organise and also means that the live tour can only be performed at specific dates & times, when actors are available. For that reason we'll also include a version without live performances. Users can access that at any time. With the ParticipArt app, we are also exploring how it might be possible to include some elements of live performance on a self-guided tour with augmented reality technology. We also aim to explore other ways to combine the audio tour with other educational or experimental formats. That could include, for example, an audio tour with an open escape room.

Reflection & Insights

1 | Process vs. result

2 | Tell me a story

3 | Open for the unexpected

4 | Spread the word

5 | Something for everyone

6 | Show me the money

7 | A common language

1 | Process vs. result

Any project that mixes artistic professionals with beginners, especially youth, will face an inevitable methodological question: to give more importance to the process, to the aesthetic or social result, or to find a balance between the two. In our experience, it's not necessarily a matter of choosing one of the three options, but of evaluating and reflecting on the objectives of each proposed activity.

Giving more importance to the process is intuitively the most appropriate choice in the case of training courses, meetings and exchanges. On the contrary, the result will be more important in the case of a public presentation of an artistic product. In that case, there will be an aesthetic requirement. That's based on the context of the presentation, like the festival or theatre event, and on the fact that audience will be ignorant of the prior processes.

What it means for Urban ParticipArt

To maintain engagement during a process, especially with youth, we recommend continually evaluating project objectives with participants. Use this feedback to adjust the relative importance of training, implementation, aesthetics and functional outcomes. Be aware that some artistic projects born via training have unexpectedly become performative jewels. Similarly, projects originally oriented to a result may sometimes switch gears and choose to sacrifice aesthetics or concrete outcomes in favour of the quality of the process.

In Urban ParticipArt, urban space and social needs of local communities take a leading role. This doesn't mean final results take priority. For many local projects, the process is an essential moment for building community. That being said, be wary about losing the energy of new connections and collective wisdom at the end of a process—a frequent outcome of artistic projects after the end of the grant money or the final performance.

For these reasons, we suggest designing projects with a means to keep networks and final results alive. Open a social media page or chat group, schedule regular meetings to stay in touch and identify the active participants who may want to take the lead in organising or in planning future interventions. Find ways to keep the results, whether videos, photos, stories or digital games, visible in the community and accessible for other citizens or other professionals working in the neighbourhood. To support maintenance of these archives, it may be necessary to partner with city departments, community centres, museums, libraries or other non-profit organisations.

Example in the field: Tools of Animation

Tools of Animation is a project developed and repeated by INCA between 2006 and 2014. Over 240 cultural and social operators were trained to provide animation tools for engaging youth in local social action. We started by building a local intervention in advance with a series of communities. Next we developed them further with teams of around 30 international participants via a one-week artistic process. That was about learning concrete tools and then applying them to the intervention.

The process was the main pedagogical element for participants. By applying tools in the field together, they experienced the challenges and possibilities of the tools firsthand. This led to deep experiential learning and also built a fast bond between participants, including new friendships. One of the process highlights was the sharing of experiences, both within and between groups, at the end of work day. This revealed insights and perspectives.

For many participants, the site-specific community theatre performance at the end of the week was also essential. This moment of seeing all the pieces of their work come together, in front of the public, was a stressful but also satisfying moment. The intended social impact of each intervention added to this satisfaction and motivated participants to work through the prior learning process.

2 | Tell me a story

Storytelling is one of the oldest forms of art, present in every culture and time period. Stories are a powerful universal language that inspires and engages. From our grandma to the bonfire with friends, we can all recall meaningful stories that have now become part of us. Storytelling is also the basis for most other forms of art and communication. Traditionally storytelling is an oral art form, but images, movement and even smells and tastes also tell us stories.

Interest in storytelling in urbanism and planning has grown over the last two decades. By telling and listening to stories, people in the present can, in a visceral way, make sense of what is special about a community and why it is the way it is. Similarly, stories can help us look toward the possible. Stories in planning processes thus often contain ideas for the future and indicate possible roles for people and events in making that future happen[9].

A big advantage of using stories in urban projects is that they can inspire people, whether citizens, professionals or government, especially by emotionally connecting listeners to a place or community. In this way, stories can reach people in ways that statistics and other 'hard' data cannot.

What it means for Urban ParticipArt

Everyone can be a storyteller, especially if one speaks from the heart to share their personal passion and wisdom. Every place also has a (hi)story, ready to be uncovered and told. ParticipArt takes advantage of this ubiquity and universality by offering methods for building and sharing stories. When used with digital tools like the izi.Travel or ParticipArt apps, new possibilities arise for analysing, experiencing and sharing these stories.

We always begin a ParticipArt process by researching the stories connected with the neighbourhood or urban location where we work. These can be facts, legends or personal stories. When we keep our eyes and ears open, and especially when we slow down, we're often surprised at the unexpected ways that stories turn up. That can be from people, like shopowners or dogwalkers, to physical spaces, like examining the layers of construction on a building facade or square.

[9] Merlijn van Hulst (July 11, 2012) "Storytelling, a model of and a model for planning", Planning Theory: 11(3) 299–318
[10] Project developed by CAAT Projects in collaboration with Home of Participation.

We also experience how sharing stories with the community can be an important bonding experience. That can be a first step to start seeing urban space as 'ours' and developing new collaborative perspectives for the future.

Example in the field: Atlantis[10]

With a neighbourhood group in Rotterdam, we created a fantasy story as a means to reflect on community & inclusion and to develop concrete actions together. In this story, the underwater country of Atlantis collapses, forcing residents to ask for asylum in other countries. The participants were divided into two groups, each representing one neighbourhood. The groups had to decide whether or not to accept refugees and to agree on types of integration. Every decision led to a different outcome. The choices were made difficult through twists in the plot.

The challenging process of collective decision-making bonded participants and also provided a chance for us to reflect with them on personal values. During the debriefing we made connections between the resulting stories and the realities in our neighbourhood. We also reflected on our role as active citizens in the community. The results were also used to connect people sharing similar values and to plan activities focused on neighbourhood inclusion and integration.

Photo: Storytelling are often assumed to be in verbal or written form. However movement, sound and visual displays are also highly effective at communicating a narrative, whether on its own or as part of a verbal narrative.

3 | Open for the unexpected[11]

It's not possible to offer the perfect recipe. In other words, no method works the same way in every context, and neighbourhood contexts are as diverse as the people living in them. The best way to produce something interesting and stimulating for participants is to adapt to and be inspired by our specific urban context. That means staying open to new insights that come up and not being afraid to take a few wrong turns. That's messier and more challenging than a traditional linear process, but in our experience, the mess is where we find the overlooked gems and the innovations. From a pedagogical perspective, it's also only through experiments 'in the kitchen' that we grow and learn together as citizens.

What it means for Urban ParticipArt

Although we hope you are inspired by ParticipArt methods and experiences, we also hope you make the process your own. One of the best ways to do this in a community process is by identifying existing projects and arts facilitators who live and work in the neighbourhood in which you are working. Work with such locals whenever possible and also be inspired by their approaches.

Keep in mind that our 'anti-recipe' approach still provides space to keep an end product in mind, like a community photo exhibition for an abandoned apartment block. There's also space for a desired impact, like sharing concrete ideas for improving the block. Such goals are imporant, especially because they're usually necessary to get citizens on board, convince financiers or government to invest and keep the process focused.

Be aware that many professionals, like city planners, do not know how to manage theatre tools. Citizens and other non-experts may also feel frustrated if they feel a project has no control as much as theatre directors or performers without a clear and common direction. Therefore, be sure to try new ingredients step-by-step and in mutual agreement between professionals, facilitators and participants. This minimises risk and ensures everyone feels ownership over the process.

[11] This section is inspired by 'Art and Creativity in intercultural trainings' Nov 19, 2013 publication description European Youth Foundation – Council of Europe publication description quadrilingual edition, 2013 http://inca-kit.blogspot.com.es/ Brunetti, R., D'Argenio, S., Gulletta, R., Nargi, E., & Pessina, C. (2013). Art and creativity in intercultural trainings. European Youth Foundation – Council of Europe

Example in the field: Idvat

The Idvat project shows how important it is to be open to the unexpected. INCA organised the project in 2008 in Italy, showcasing a combination of technologies—like live video, recorded video, live & recorded sound, video mapping and multi-screening—within a theatre show at a rural home. We had originally planned a structured process to use a specific set of technologies, selected in advance. While working we discovered an entirely different format. That was based on each group of participants freely engaging with different technologies, including those with which they had no experience. In the process of finding their way through unfamiliar technologies, they discovered new ways to combine them and to integrate them with theatre.

The result was an exceptional performance for the community that more realistically reflected their lives. For participants, the unexpected results included a peer-to-peer learning process in which they shared a new medium that we called theatre-video.

Photo: Participants in Idvat set up equipment needed for 'theater-video' prior to an on-location rehearsal.

4 | Spread the word

The success of community building and co-creation depends on effective communication. That's about reaching citizens & entrepreneurs to support your process, work with you in it or spread the word. It may also be about delivering a message or proposal to decision-makers or the media. Arts are an effective means through which grassroots initiatives and urban problems can reach and enter into fruitful dialogue with these key stakeholders. That's especially due to the ability of arts, especially stories, to communicate the personal and the emotional, along with the attraction of visual or other aesthetics as compared to a traditional planning report, for example.

What it means for Urban ParticipArt

The use of participatory arts in community processes creates opportunities for performative demonstration of urban problems, situations and changes. Participants in these processes are also often inspired to share photos or videos of their experiences and artistic results widely on social media. As such, outreach for such projects can be very high in contrast to more bureaucratic or academic reporting systems. Sharing especially increases when the artistic product has a high emotional value or a high cultural and artistic value. In these cases very broad audience can be reached, sometimes not only locally but internationally.

As such, artistic methods become important tools for citizen participants to share their message. They also become tools to reach decision-makers, investors and others who view the final product. In this way, wider audiences can be invited to join the dialogue or other parts of the co-creation process and have in-depth information to make more informed decisions.

Example in the field: Szabihíd

Szabihíd, the annual closing of the Liberty Bridge in Budapest, shows the power of participatory arts to communicate a message that triggers urban change. The bridge is an important part of Budapest's transport system, with thousands of cars, trams, cyclists and pedestrians using it daily. Few municipal planning officials or traffic engineers would have proposed this idea: it would be seen as too impractical and 'pie-in-the-sky' thinking.

Everything changed when citizen-led cultural events spontaneously popped up during a temporary construction closure. That mushroomed quickly via word of mouth and media attention, including images of the artistic performances and the festive atmosphere. This snowballed into the dozens of initiatives today by diverse coalitions of citizens & professionals, including ProProgressione, on reclaiming the area around the bridge and the banks of the Danube River as public space. The project has been able to survive under varying political leaders and political climates. Important to note is that no planning report, academic study or manifesto was required to stimulate action and change. Only a few gutsy citizens, a space and word of mouth was needed to start a movement. The rest took care of itself. In the words of Marshall McLuhan, the medium was the message[12].

Photo: Images from the Szabihíd event in Budapest, by by participants and professional photographers, were shared widely on social media

[12] Marshall McLuhan (1964). Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man. Montreal: McGraw-Hill.

5 | Something for everyone

Urban projects are as successful as they are inclusive of those affected by it. That doesn't mean a bland outcome that offers a little to everyone. It means a process that acknowledges the diversity of voices and perspectives, including those that are more difficult to reach. That includes youth with fewer opportunities, whose voices are very often missing in urban decision-making. The advantage of participatory arts is that when properly facilitated, they are accessible to anyone. Not everyone's comfortable in formal or intellectual settings. But everyone can play and create through the arts, even if they haven't discovered that yet.

What it means for Urban ParticipArt

Facilitating inclusive creative processes requires facilitators to build a welcoming structure that eases people into the process. Throughout the process it's important to celebrate mistakes as normal. We learn from them and get better prepared for the next time. Positive reinforcement and interactive games are also good strategies for loosening people up. Making people feel good with each other and embracing joyfulness and silliness within the group opens people toward themselves, others and joint creativity. This aspect of participatory arts can be helpful when mobilising participants and locating funding.

It's important to recognise that everyone has unique and valid preferences in creative processes. Each person first may prefer a specific artistic form, whether that's theatre, dance, painting or photography, each of which also offers its own possibilities. People from certain cultural backgrounds may also be attracted to specific forms. Within these forms, people will also prefer roles, whether that's being in the front line, taking care of technical issues, acting, planning & production, make-up or ideas & design directing. This diversity is necessary for a good result.

There are different approaches to ensuring inclusiveness. One approach is representativeness, which means including the voice of every group that would be affected by an urban project. The demographic approach is based on either accounting for the proportion of groups in a community, or ensuring one or two people from each group in order to ensure a plurality of voices. The chosen approach should be tailored to the situation. In all cases however, an inclusive approach demands putting inclusivity before cost-efficiency. When cost-efficiency comes first, it usually means focusing on the majority at the expense of minorities. Finally, an inclusive approach means being aware and critical of accepted premises of city building, which are traditionally focused on the reasonably well-off white male.

Example in the field: Shadow Theater[13]

For many years we have used participatory arts methods to work with a group of undocumented people in Rotterdam. We especially use theater and performance to create public awareness and initiate dialogue. We discovered, however, that the average public does not deeply understand the hardships and realities that undocumented people face. Thus, the dialogues were not as fruitful as hoped. Another major challenge is that live performance risked exposing the undocumented person.

For these reasons we decided to use shadow theatre. This ancient and asethetically beautiful technique also symbolises the way that undocumented people feel in society: like a shadow that is either unseen or ignored. This brought a new dimension to the aesthetic while also serving as a powerful educational metaphor.

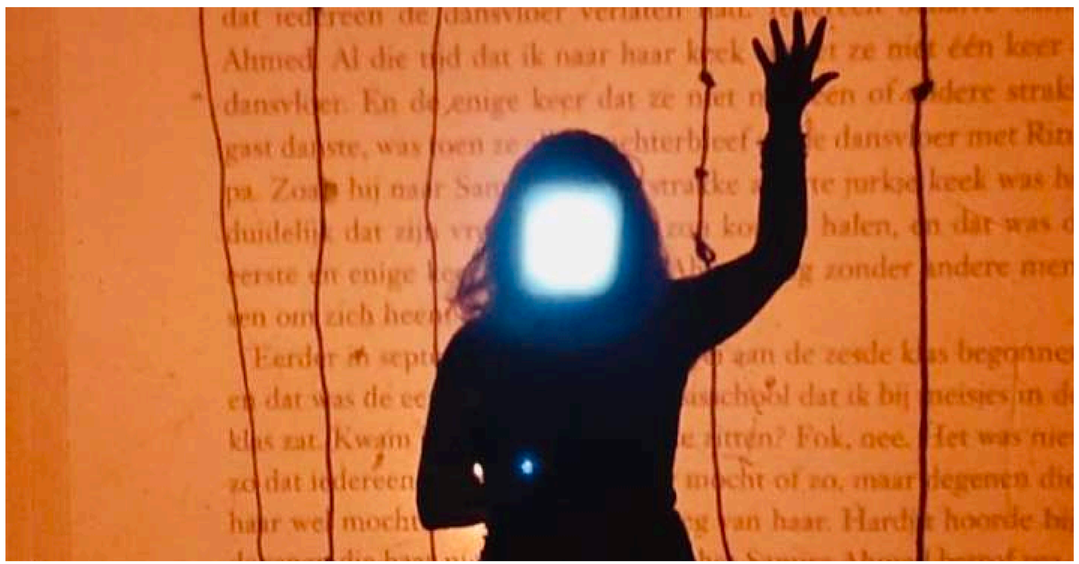


Photo: Shadow Theatre workshop at Stichting Formaat (Taken by: Anita van Ast)
[13] Project developed by Stichting Formaat, Rotterdam

6 | Show me the money

Putting Urban ParticipArt tools into practice doesn't have to break the bank. For cultural organisations and experts, offering Urban ParticipArt tools to municipalities or other clients can even bring revenue. Typical cultural grants are often poorly paid and highly competitive. Because Urban ParticipArt methods address challenges in diverse fields like inclusivity, sustainability and public space design, there are many possible funding streams.

What it means for Urban ParticipArt

Artistic initiatives are traditionally funded project-by-project, in which every financing source stands on its own. Funds may be from local or national government, foundations or the European Union (see appendix). In recent years, crowdfunding has become more common. Some crowdfunding platforms, like Crowdfunding4Culture, focus on cultural initiatives. Others focus on social or civic projects, like Spacehive in the United Kingdom. The advantage of the project-by-project approach is its flexibility. It's quick to start, scale up and downsize. The disadvantage is that it's unpredictable and dependent on external developments.

A more recent approach involves executing commissions on behalf of a municipality, for example to tell the story of a neighbourhood that will be renewed. In some cities, there are formal means for citizen groups to take over municipal services or tasks. After successfully 'challenging' a public service, they are tasked with carry out the service in a way that suits their community best, which may include arts-based methods. The advantage of this approach is that it can be a source of long-term stable financing. Also, because citizen groups can usually carry out tasks at a lower cost than municipalities, they can use the extra budget to execute tasks in a way that achieves additional community goals, like hiring disadvantaged people. The downside of a challenge process is that it demands a more developed citizen organisation. Initiating a 'challenge' may not be possible in municipalities without a formal challenge process.

Our teams have found it useful to build a local community of practice. Creating a network of participatory artists makes it easy to offer potential clients a wide range of methods, or expertise in working with specific demographics. A joint portfolio of projects and methods can help show the possibilities. Neighbourhood organisations, like affordable housing associations, can be included in such a network.

Example in the field: Claes de Vrieselaan Park

A trio of young residents living next to Claes de Vrieselaan, a 1-km boulevard in Rotterdam West, dreamed of a new future for a forgotten patch of green in the middle of the street. They shared a vision for a space for children to play, nature to grow and culture to flourish, built with neighbours. Beginning with a small grant, they step-by-step transformed it into a colourful park including gardens, terraces, a jeu-de-boules court and performance space. Their work inspired nearby business owners and other citizens to make their own projects, for new seating, sculptural art & murals, a storytelling app and air quality equipment. As the project has grown, initiators have managed to secure major financing.

This example inspired a neighbourhood-led process to transform the entire Claes de Vrieselaan. The municipality commissioned de Middellander, a neighbourhood-owned social enterprise, to support this. Citizens have used arts to carry out a dialogue with the neighbourhood, gather data and share ideas. The results are spectacular: a new plan that halves the amount of car space in favour of more green.

Photo: Volunteers designed and constructed the gardens and other elements in the new Claes de Vrieselaan park in Rotterdam.

7 | A common language

Developing and guiding participatory activities in the urban field requires many competences, especially when touching sensitive topics or including a diversity of target groups. Our field teams comprise a range of specialised experts: social workers, cultural operators, communication experts, facilitators, urban planners, psychologists, project managers and more, according to the objectives of the project. That's a mix of people who use both the brain in an office and the body in activities.

Such a mix can be challenging. For those without artistic training, it may be difficult to understand the language of art. Urban planners, for example, are usually trained to read maps, figures and data, but have less experience navigating the world of stories, emotions and movement. Many artistic professionals, on the other hand, may not be familiar with the political, legal and other aspects of a formal planning or design process. Working in communities also often means working with people who are not used to artistic or creative expression, let alone participating at all in their communities.

What it means for Urban ParticipArt

At the beginning of ParticipArt processes, we find it helpful to agree on a common vocabulary of key artistic and process terms. That could be in the context of agreeing on project timelines and deliverables. Having this discussion up-front can prevent later confusion or miscommunication among professionals from different fields.

To support those who are less used to artistic work, we build a non-judgmental space and process. That means collecting all ideas, from professionals & citizens, with absolute acceptance. This context gives participants confidence to let their creative mind roam and to share freely. Good facilitation is needed to shape such a space. A facilitator also should help groups avoid the tendency of staying with the emotion of the first idea.

Following the open process, the most interesting ideas are openly and honestly selected so that they can be artistically reworked into a final result. This structuring is the point when the real community artistic work begins. It is a slow task that has to be developed step by step. For youth especially, this approach can be the basis for developing collaboration & critical thinking skills.

Example in the field: Union of Minorities

A group of 15 diverse types of organisations – universities, municipalities, and youth agencies, from 7 different countries, came together to create a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) called 'Union of minorities. Educational tools for the European cultural mosaic'. The topic of diversity and working with minorities is complex enough on its own. Collaboratively building a MOOC on this topic was very challenging. That was especially because there were professionals from different types of organisations and areas of expertise, from different countries and speaking various languages.

Communication within the team was difficult, especially at the beginning. We did not agree at first on the structure of the MOOC. Those with a background in non-formal education, gamification, and the arts, felt like their perspective was overlooked. Turning points happened when we came together and experienced some of those practices. Team building games, spaces for dialogues & reflection, and informal moments allowed us to get closer, understand each other and recognise the value of creative and artistic processes. Then, we were able to find a common ground and to enrich the MOOC with different but equally

Photo: Participants collaborating through interactive activities during the training course from project MOOC in Amarante, Portugal.

Appendix: EU Grants for ParticipArt in the Field

For those who have a European network and want to apply Urban ParticipArt methods in their communities, there are possibilities to apply for grants from the European Union. This can be especially helpful for those in cities and countries in which there isn't much funding available for community projects. A good start is to regularly check opportunities at https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home. Below we also summarise four main grant programmes that are especially relevant for ParticipArt.

1. Erasmus+

Erasmus+ offers opportunities to gain experience abroad, for example through professional development activities, and to participate in innovation and modernisation projects contributing to inclusive participation. One of the many possibilities in relation to Urban ParticipArt is to organise youth exchanges and trainings that focus on applying ParticipArt tools in local communities.
The advantage of Erasmus+ grants is that applicant organisations can be any size, including small or informal organisations. Budgets are simple due to 'lump-sums'. Financial reporting is also straightforward. No co-funding is required, although the grants do not always cover all costs. Disadvantages include an extensive application and a strict structure that limits activities eligible for funding.

If you are interested in applying for this grant, it's wise to contact your Erasmus+ national agency. They are very helpful in answering questions and can also review your draft application before submission. Note that they are also the agency that approves or rejects final submitted Erasmus+ applications. Also note that eligible programme countries are those in the EU countries plus North Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Serbia and Turkey. Other countries, called partner countries, have only limited possibilities.

When looking for information on Erasmus+, be aware that it's a large umbrella that contains diverse sub-programmes. Make sure that the information you're reading concerns the right programme. The information below is about the sub-programme Youth & Youth Workers. For these purposes, a youth is someone between the ages of 13 and 30. The terms and conditions are contained in the programme guide for 2021 to 2027 (see link in footnote[14]).

Below are some of the of grants in the Youth and Youth Workers sub-programme that might be useful in relation to ParticipArt:

a) Youth Participation Activities[15]
If you are planning an Urban ParticipArt project run by youth (aged 18 to 30), then this is the grant for you. It can be local, regional, national or international. It can be an informal group and it's not obligatory to have other partners. We advise this option for local ParticipArt projects that foresee a number of events. The maximum grant awarded is 60.000 euros. Budget-wise, you can receive a project management amount of 500 per month, coaching costs (when you apply as an informal group), the possibility for inclusion & exceptional costs, a travel budget if necessary, and event support of 100 euros per participant in the event.

b) Learning mobility in the field of youth[16]
This is useful to organise training to increase the competencies of professionals (youth workers, youth leaders or volunteers). The current programme period now includes a simplified application once your organisation is accredited. Budget-wise, there is also now a difference between

[14] Erasmus+ Programme Guide: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/erasmus-programme-guide-2021_en
[15] Page 149 of Version 1 (2021): 25/03/2021 of the Programme Guide
[16] Page 120 of Version 1 (2021): 25/03/2021 of the Programme Guide

organisational support and individual support. There is the possibility for increased travel budget for green travel and an economic incentive for inclusion of participants with special needs.

Youth Exchanges

You will need a minimum of two groups. Each group needs at least four young people plus one youth leader (the age restrictions do not apply to the leader). The duration of the exchange is 5 to 21 days, although in our experience most are not more than a week plus traveling days. Regarding the budget, the individual support is not very high. In some cases, not all your costs will be covered.

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Youth Workers' Mobilities

This is meant for training of youth workers on relevant topics, which could include ParticipArt tools. It requires a minimum of two participating organisations from different countries, although in our experience there are usually many more. You can decide how many participants join per country; two or three is the most common. The final group is usually around 20 to 30 participants (officially up to 50).

The duration is from 2 to 60 days, with the most common being five to seven plus traveling days. Budget-wise, it is similar to youth exchanges but with greater individual support. If you are only interested in receiving training, check the training calendar: https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/european-training-calendar/browse/

c) Small-scale partnerships[17]

This is especially interesting if you need to adapt Urban ParticipArt methods to the specific groups you work with. Help us take ParticipArt to the next level! This grant targets new or less-experienced organisations and small-scale actors. The grant proposal and the financial report are simplified as compared to the cooperation partnerships (described in next section). You can ask for 30,000 or 60,000 euros. During the project you can reallocate the funds, allowing one to adapt to unexpected situations. This is one of the few EU grants available for organisations that have simplified accountability and/or do not have paid staff. The minimum number of partners is two, and should be from different countries. The duration of the project can be between 6 and 24 months.

d) Cooperation partnerships[18]

This is especially suitable for those already experienced in projects at the European level and ready to engage in a bigger research & innovation project. The project duration is 12 to 36 months and the budgets must be between 100,000 to 400,000 euros. Requests above 60.000 euros require organisation to prove financial capacity. This grant also includes the description of 'work packages', which was not the case in earlier editions of Erasmus+ youth strategic partnerships.

2. Solidarity Corps

This targets young people (volunteers, youth leaders or youth), which could include support for local organisations to develop Urban ParticipArt projects. It can be a good opportunity for volunteering and creating solidarity projects. Note that it replaces the previous EVS programme. Check the 2021 call here: https://europa.eu/youth/sites/default/files/european_solidarity_corps_guide_2021.pdf

3. Creative Europe

Creative Europe has two sub-programmes, culture and media. It's cross-sectoral approach combining artistic projects with socially-relevant issues like inclusion, gender equality and the environmental crisis, is a great fit for a variety of ParticipArt projects. An advantage, especially when compared to Erasmus+, is greater freedom to structure the process and budget. A disadvantage is that applicants must bring a certain percentage of co-funding. Find more info here: https://ec.europa.eu/culture/creative-europe

4. European Youth Foundation from the Council of Europe

Council of Europe offers good chances for youth non-profit organisations to get funding for a pilot project. The Council has 47 European members and a few additional countries are eligible for this grant. Check all the procedures and requirements here: https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-youth-foundation.

[17] Page 192 of Version 1 (2021): 25/03/2021 of the Programme Guide

[18] Page 175 of Version 1 (2021): 25/03/2021 of the Programme Guide

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