Past Present Futures of Urban Change

Futur

Past

Present

Editorial

Our cities and communities are in constant change, and the ways we—as citizens, neighbors, activists, professionals, public servants, academics—are able to shape that transformation together is also ever changing. On the one hand, we have seen progress in our bubbles as our communities go through a process of collective growth and evolution: it has become increasingly clear that we can only achieve systemic, large-scale change by learning how to better work together. Yet, on the other hand, we are constantly faced with setbacks, overwhelmed, and struggling with helplessness in the face of compounding social and ecological crises. Given the profound threats to our way of life and all the things we hold dear in the places we call home, there has never been a more urgent need for decisive action.

This feels, in many ways, like a pivotal moment for generations to come. The global COVID-19 pandemic forced all of us to reevaluate what matters most. There is no going back to business as usual. It's time for bold imagination and collective sensemaking: how do we create a new normal, one that is more sustainable, inclusive, and just? How might we work together to build places and communities that support a just transition to a more regenerative culture, both locally and globally?

This publication is our invitation to you, dear reader, to engage with these questions and discover your own answers. These pages represent eight years of learning from more than 120 engaged people and urban practitioners who have been working in 36 cities spread across 28 countries in Europe and its neighboring regions. Herein you will find their stories, experiences, impacts, and visions for the future.

The magazine is divided into three sections: *The Past*, *The Present*, and *The Future* of urban change. *The Past* focuses on insights drawn from running our translocal, cross-sectoral collaboration program for nearly a decade, including stories from our network about the long-term impacts of participant projects, from both personal and collective perspectives. *The Present* focuses on the fourth and final round of the program that spanned 2019 to 2021. The ten participating teams (and their projects) represented an especially unique round for Actors of Urban Change and taught us a great deal about facing global crisis and uncertainty. Last but not least, *The Future* is dedicated to the collective imagination of possible futures, capturing visions from our network on how we might live, work, and collaborate in our future cities.

As the program comes to an end, the Actors of Urban Change community will live on in different ways: some will merge with other networks; some will start new projects and pathways; and others still will dissolve, and perhaps leave behind a fruitful soil where new ideas can grow. Regardless, all have contributed to a thriving ecosystem of urban changemakers, who will continue experimenting, adapting to the new realities they face, and transforming our cities.

Joice Biazoto Program Manager, ACT

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FROM COMPATIBILITY TO SUSTAINABLE IMPACT

BY JOICE BIAZOTO & NAOMI MARTIN

A Journey for Urban Changemakers

Like many other international cooperation programs, Actors of Urban Change has relied on international travel and face-to-face exchange to promote collaboration and knowledge sharing among urban practitioners. As global travel came to a halt during the COVID-19 pandemic, things we took for granted in our work—like simply being able to sit in the same room with program participants—were suddenly no longer possible. And, as we've come to find out, alternatives such as virtual meetings, while liberating in some ways, are proving increasingly exhausting and alienating.

As a result, many of us have felt disconnected from each other, from our work, and from the change we are trying to bring about. Many of the ways we used to work are no longer sustainable and yet, in a world of distancing and isolation, we need connection more than ever. Moreover, the global climate crisis requires creative solutions emerging from collective, networked action for systemic change. And so we face an identity crisis. How can we keep working together? What creates and nurtures connection in a world of increased isolation? And how can connection fuel broader social change? Looking for the answer to these questions is at the core of what we do in the ACT program.

We like to look at our program as a transformational journey that teams embark upon together. It's a journey that starts with individuals connecting over a shared idea for how to make their city a better place to live.

STEP 1
WORKING TOWARDS COMPATIBILITY

One of the pillars of our work at ACT is cross-sectoral collaboration. That means participants hoping to be accepted into the program have to form teams of three, with each team member coming from a different sector, whether nonprofit, public, or private. Some of these teams might have worked together previously in different contexts, while others get to know each other for the first time. For all teams to collaborate well, they must first create a stable base for their collaboration. That means continually working on their relationships as people and their compatibility as a team. This is not unlike the work that couples, families, and communities invest into their relationships to promote health, harmony, and balance. Discovering (and negotiating) individual and shared values, needs, and wishes; discovering strengths and

weaknesses; developing common language and shared meaning; and finding our role within the constellation—all of these are crucial for getting deeper into the work and answering crucial questions: what is the change we want to see? Do we have a common understanding of the problems we want to address? What assumptions have we made along the way? So begins the work of aligning project activities and goals with a shared vision for change.

STEP 2
INVITING CO-CREATION

Although the work of building compatibility remains ongoing and must be revisited continuously, teams that have created a solid base for working together must then look outward and bring others along the journey. Sustainable urban change can never happen in a vacuum: our cities and neighborhoods are places where countless bubbles meet, each with their own values, needs, and visions for the spaces they share.

If change is to be embraced, those who are affected by it must play their part, and not through mere token participation (as participation has been so often misused for decades in urban planning). Rather, we invite teams to practice true co-creation in their projects. That means eschewing pre-conceived outcomes in favor of truly including community voices from the earliest stages of planning right through to project completion. For this to work, it's crucial to build trust and create safer spaces where people from various backgrounds feel comfortable to express their needs and wishes. Additionally, teams must become aware of their own blind spots and privileges in order to address questions of power and influence in collaboration and co-creation.

STEP 3
ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

By this stage, teams have a shared vision, not just among teammates, but together with the communities they want to serve. The team and its community believes in the change they want to create and are ready to get to work. And yet, making it happen will take (more than) a village: each team, project, and neighborhood is part of a larger system, but larger systems tend to change very slowly, are risk averse, and resist influence from the bottom up. The challenge becomes, then, to advocate for desired change on a larger scale: to approach and gain allies at different levels of leadership and spheres of influence, to build long-lasting alliances, to work through potential blockages together, and to get the message across to a wider audience in order to gain traction and support for their ideas. The ACT local projects often serve as a vehicle for change, trying out a big idea on a smaller scale, demonstrating community support and instigating more far-reaching conversations on a different way of doing things.

STEP 4
SUSTAINING THE IMPACT

As teams reach the end of the program and their journey together, the work is hardly ever done. In many ways, it's just beginning. Now comes the time to send their visions out into the world and allow them to bear fruit on their own. While this involves giving up control of the outcomes, there are steps teams can still take at this stage to support the process, maintain momentum, and help multiply and

sustain their efforts. This usually involves reflecting on knowledge gained, victories, and failures as well as shifting perspectives to find ways of transferring the team's insights to other contexts.

Finally, the journey comes full circle as the collective process feeds into a deeper personal reflection, encouraging actors to ask themselves: "What have we learned about ourselves through our collaborations? How might we work with others moving forward?"

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The formats, tools, and media we use for connecting to each other will continue to change and evolve as we adapt, experiment, and play with hybrid formats, new technologies, and more sustainable ways of traveling and gathering. Still, no matter the method, human connection that can cross boundaries—be they geographical, sectoral, cultural, or otherwise —will continue to serve as the foundation of action for positive urban change. We've found the ACT journey to be a useful roadmap for activists looking to start their transformation from within, build deep meaningful relationships, and scale up their efforts, no matter how small.

8 YEARS OF ACT

BY NEHA MUNGEKAR IGNO NOTERMANS TIMO VON WIRTH

DRIFT* FOR TRANSITION

Empowerment, Social Learning, and Translocal Diffusion

The Actors of Urban Change (ACT) program connects and supports urban changemakers so they can improve their cities. Over eight years, the program has attracted over 120 participants from 37 cities all over Europe, including Turkey, Georgia, and Russia. But how did the program actually empower all these local projects? DRIFT evaluated the program's impact on its participants by using three unique lenses: empowerment, social learning, and translocal diffusion.

We are aware that an eight-year program cannot be fully assessed with just a survey and evaluative workshops conducted with participants and the management team. Still, this evaluation revealed insights into how the program achieved its goals, as well as some accompanying limitations and tensions. We hope this evaluation helps illustrate the program's impact on those involved and inspires others even outside of ACT.

THE LENSES

We conducted the evaluation based on the concepts of empowerment, social learning, and translocal diffusion.

The first concept—*empowerment*[1]—refers to the way someone gains the capacity to influence their environment in the desired direction. Looking at empowerment focuses not on outcomes but rather the process of autonomous motivation. We analyzed participant empowerment during their tenure with the ACT program through six dimensions: relatedness, autonomy, competence, impact, meaning, and resilience.

The second concept—*social learning*[2]—focuses on the learning that happens through interaction with others and understands learning as a shared practice. We assessed the social learning of participants by looking at the development of knowledge, skills, and reflexivity, as well as the degree of social learning that took place throughout the program.

Lastly, we also understand the ACT program as a translocal network.[3] These networks support replicating innovations in other contexts as well as sharing and developing skills, knowledge, and discourses across space. Members of translocal networks also learn from each other's failures. Altogether, we call this *translocal diffusion*,

(1)   Avelino, F., Dumitru, A., Cipolla, C., Kunze, I., & Wittmayer, J. (2020). *Translocal empowerment in transformative social innovation networks*. European Planning Studies, 28(5), 955-977. doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2019.1578339

(2)   Dumitru, A., Lema-Blanco, I., Kunze, I., Kemp, R., Wittmayer, J., Haxeltine, A., García-Mira, R., Zuijderwijk, L. and Cozan, S. (2017). *Social learning in social innovation initiatives: learning about systemic relations and strategies for transformative change* (TRANSIT Brief; 4), TRANSIT: EU SHH.2013.3.2-1 Grant agreement no: 613169.

(3)   Loorbach, D., Wittmayer, J., Avelino, F., von Wirth, T., & Frantzeskaki, N. (2020). *Transformative innovation and translocal diffusion. Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*. sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2210422420300198

which in turn fosters translocal empowerment that increases access to resources, builds legitimacy, and develops shared narratives.

Our evaluation discovered several themes that emerged within each of these three lenses.

EMPOWERMENT: FROM INNER WORK TO A COLLECTIVE PROCESS

01   BUILDING CONFIDENCE TO DRIVE THE DESIRED CHANGE

On an individual level, the ACT program helped participants gain the confidence to change. Some participants stated that they are now being taken more seriously than they were before the experience and can now successfully amend their project's strategy to create the desired impact. As participants gained new knowledge, they also gained more confidence to change. The program provided them with training sessions that built their capacities as change agents. These sessions focused on knowledge-building and strengthening capabilities such as participatory methods, conflict resolutions, and process design. This encouraged participants to work on many other skills that they had not considered previously, like cross-sector collaborations.

02 ENHANCING PROFESSIONALISM AND NORMALIZING ENGAGEMENTS

ACT provided a platform where the actors recognized, validated and formalized the soft, unseen engagement practices required to make the project work. This approach cultivated a sense of professionalism and made them accept this engagement as normal. The academies, retreats, and constant exchange encouraged participants to prepare and reflect on their work and strategies. This was described as a soft force that professionalized and strengthened their abilities.

03 NOT LETTING THE PANDEMIC HINDER THE ONGOING EFFORTS

All these efforts, communication, and sharing continue despite COVID-related travel bans and lockdowns. The participants were still able to connect with their peers and continued to strengthen their purpose-driven work.

The ACT program helped us form new visions of urban change in our city, to bring new ideas from meetings and visits, and to adapt these ideas to the local reality.

Program Participant

04 REALIZING THAT EMPOWERMENT IS A COLLECTIVE PROCESS

In connecting with others, participants learned the importance of collaboration and diverse ways of strengthening collaborative engagement for urban change. The program made the participants realize that empowerment is not just an individual goal but a collective process. They also feel that they can now empathize better, enabling them to understand the needs of different actors of their respective projects.

SOCIAL LEARNING: BREAKING PREJUDICES, SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES AND SELF-REFLECTION

01 PARTICIPANTS EXCHANGED INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

The interactions with others helped participants in the ACT program learn new approaches and tools, such as placemaking interventions, community engagement, systems-thinking, private-sector engagement, etc. These new approaches included innovative and creative ways of working that were shared within and between teams. Some of these insights led to 'a-ha moments' that allowed participants to take their projects to a new level, often by reframing problems and developing new strategies. The new insights also helped in breaking prejudices, which were hindering their processes of work.

02 INTERACTIONS LEAD TO CHANGE IN PERSPECTIVES

Social interactions also helped participants gain new perspectives. They moved from focusing just on the project-related outcomes to relating them to global social changes. Many realized the value of and need for engaging with a broader set of stakeholders and subsequently enlarged their local stakeholder engagement.

03 SOCIAL LEARNING MOTIVATED PARTICIPANTS TO SELF-REFLECT

Interacting with other participants also helped them self-reflect. They felt moved to develop themselves to be a better person and build a better team. For example, many participants reported wanting to improve their managerial skills, leadership qualities, and personal traits relevant to the betterment of the project. Also, the international exchange experiences developed confidence in actors to pursue their own goals and apply them on the ground.
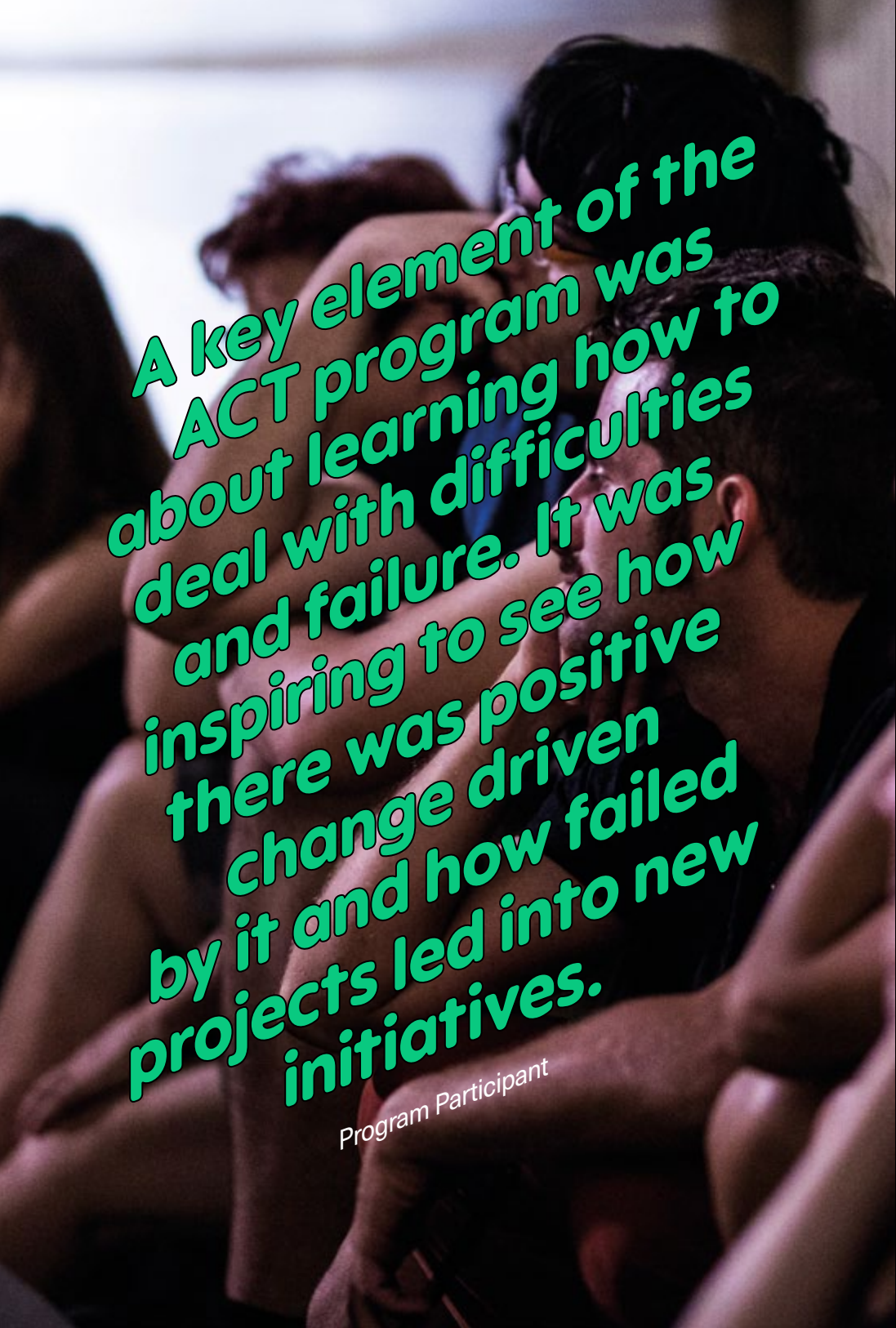
A key element of the ACT program was about learning how to deal with difficulties and failure. It was inspiring to see how there was positive change driven by it and how failed projects led into new initiatives.

Program Participant

TRANSLOCAL DIFFUSION: ON COALITIONS, MOVEMENTS, AND FAILING FORWARD

01 THE NETWORK FELT PART OF A LARGER MOVEMENT

Interactions throughout the network helped participants feel part of a larger movement with shared goals. They reported sharing the same values and even the same ideologies, as well as a shared awareness of social issues, sustainability challenges, and the need to care for society and nature. Translocal exchanges broadened participant outlooks for the scope of their projects and helped them realize they were working towards collective goals.

02 CONTINUOUS EXCHANGE OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE STORIES

During online evaluation workshops, we noticed that participants addressed problems from the perspective of 'we' rather than 'I'. By discussing how each of them combatted the pandemic crisis or local bureaucratic hindrances, participants demonstrated the ability to share ownership of challenges and opportunities. Participants exchanged inspirational success stories and lessons from the failures of others.

03   TRANSLOCAL DIFFUSION MADE PARTICIPANTS REFLECT

Realizing that you are part of something larger is a balancing act, however. One of the participants also reported how small they felt in comparison to complex social challenges. This was further reflected in their individual discoveries: qualities such as soft power, respect, helpfulness, and being down to earth—which help to cope with this feeling of smallness—were then transferable to their urban cases and into their own attitudes.

04   ENABLED FORMATION OF NEW COALITIONS

The translocal network in the ACT program also helped form new coalitions. Participants across cities were not perceived as a single movement with one clear path but rather as a series of diverse initiatives orchestrated through shared ideas and narratives of better city life. The shared ideologies made them develop 'personal links.' These personal relations kept their coalitions active even during the pandemic's various peaks. These coalitions were also able to apply for funding and consult with each other when further required.

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Program participants provided a positive and supportive evaluation of the program, although they also proposed some minor adjustments. The actual urban-change impacts in their cities, however, often remained absent from participants' reflections. These impacts were not monitored over the course of this evaluation. This should be subjected to future assessments that connect the capacity-building of urban change agents with actual impacts on the urban fabric of ACT's case regions across Europe. Some of those stories of local impact can be found in this publication.

Local Impact

UNDER STANDING LOCAL IMPACT

*Urban Researcher and Senior Scientist, Department of Geography, University of Zurich

BY Dr. JULIE REN*

After years of activity and investment in a project, communities and funders want to know whether they have made an impact. While the sheer diversity of Actors of Urban Change projects is inspiring, it also makes it difficult to define a standard comparative measure of local impact. The challenge of equivalency is thus built into the core of Actors of Urban Change (ACT): how, for example, can you compare the impact of a community garden in Oslo, Norway, with an open-air cinema in Novi Sad, Serbia? As a result, understanding local impact requires a more nuanced, qualitative view of both what "impact" might imply, and the boundaries of where the "local" might be situated.

IMPLICATIONS OF IMPACT

As documented both across ACT's many projects and in the Drift for Transition evaluation included in this publication, ACT program participants report immense impacts. It's important not to underestimate this and to remember that participants are also both stakeholders and members of the communities in which the projects take place. As a result of ACT's empowering effects on individuals, there are multiplying impacts on their social groups, communities, and neighborhoods. After years of participating in ACT projects, these individuals are better able to leverage their networks, skills, and experience, which is evidence not only of individual growth but also social impact. A co-creation project at a church in Vilnius, for example, demonstrated how past, present, and future users can be brought together to transform not only how the church was used but also the community's approach to decision-making.

Traditional measures of project impact, which might include quantifiable socioeconomic indicators (e.g., changing demographics, measures of inequality, adjustments in incomes, etc.) might not only be inappropriate for the small scale of many ACT projects, but they also might overlook deeper, longer lasting impacts that might be less visible. For instance, though political institutions may remain outwardly unchanged, new practices, norms, and relationships among different actors might open up new possibilities of change that were previously indiscernible. The material impact of many projects might not always be laid in concrete (literally so in the case of Critical Concrete, an alumni project from Porto), but the work of training, practice, and collaboration that ACT projects undertake ripple throughout their contexts, facilitating new endeavors in urban change in the process.

SCALES OF THE LOCAL

This element of dispersal—of transplanting seeds of change to different projects and places—also puts into question the scope of the "local" when considering local impact. Many ACT projects operate at the neighborhood scale, even down to specific city blocks and public spaces. But even with projects so clearly delineated by material space, like the craft workshops in Aveiro aiming to re-imagine the possibilities of a specific street corner, the outputs of many projects disperse beyond their neighborhoods to impact their home cities at large. In the case of Aveiro, wooden cubes produced in neighborhood workshops became symbols of imaginative possibility, of a creative output that was widely valued and represented far more than just a temporary public sculpture or the street corner where they originated. This symbol of imaginative possibility spread to the dentist's office and to neighbors' homes and made an impact beyond the site of the "local" workshop.

From the perspective of urban studies, the way we define the boundaries of the "local" is a perennial topic of debate. We see in the work of Actors of Urban Change that the city and its many neighborhoods are not self-contained, but rather places that emerge in their relationship to other places, as nodes within networks, as places shaped by the movement and interconnection of ideas and resources. Just as cities today are not container spaces, isolated from one another with walls and moats, urban change cannot rely on antiquated notions of provincial development or progress. Instead, we must expand our understanding of what it means to be local and what it means to have impact.

DECEN TRALIZING

Culture

BY OGNJEN* TOMAŠEVIĆ

*Co-founder, Novo Kulturno Naselje, Novi Sad, Serbia

The Neighborhood that Transformed Urban Cultural Policy

To begin this story, we have to go back to the year 2014. That year, a few childhood friends and their mentors decided to form a non-governmental organization with the aim of decentralizing cultural events in their city and bringing positive change to their neighborhood. We named the organization Novo Kulturno Naselje (New Cultural Neighborhood), a play on the name of our district, Novo Naselje, which is the largest neighborhood in Serbia's second-largest city, Novi Sad. At the time of the district's planning and construction, the dominant philosophy was that all cultural needs were to be satisfied by the city center, so Novo Kulturno Naselje was proposing something very new.

In 2015, when we were selected for the Actors of Urban Change (ACT) program, the main goal of our "Project NN" was to organize more cultural events for our neighborhood in a way that both involved the community and put our part of town on the map. That November, we met with all nine Actors for Urban Change project teams in Berlin. The program was unlike anything we'd ever done before. As we got to know each other through our skills and ideas, we realized the significance and global tone of this project. It was at that very first ACT meeting that we realized what our ultimate goal and objective would be: not just organizing cultural events in our neighborhood but establishing an actual cultural center for our district.

CULTURE FROM THE BOTTOM UP

The next step was to involve our community. A massive interview effort collected over 2,000 citizen suggestions for the future cultural center. Volunteers met people on the street, at local bus stops, and during cultural programs organized by our organization. Focus groups and broadcast roundtables helped establish a dialogue among cultural sector representatives, neighborhood residents, and decision makers in order to create and profile cultural

21114 Film Fest. Photo: Novo kulturno naselje

programs and activities. Since Novi Sad had also already been nominated European Youth Capital 2019, we were able to successfully argue for the importance of new cultural spaces in the city and marshall support for our project at all levels, most crucially within our local community. Altogether, this work became the "software" for the neighborhood's future cultural center, culminating in a handbook that collected the knowledge we had produced and told a story about our neighborhood and its need for the cultural space.

LESSONS LEARNED

Participating in Actors of Urban Change helped us discover not only the main mission of our organization but also new ways of reaching that goal. Spending time with like-minded people facing similar challenges, exchanging ideas with alumni and experts, and seeing first-hand how projects worked in different cities helped us make connections and expand our horizons. Our team not only gained practical experience and valuable feedback that helped hone our ideas for the project, but we also came away confident and inspired in our work, increasing our desire to even better understand how we could positively impact our community. We also learned just how important it is to advocate for your project idea and strive to make the most of it. Thanks to our experience with ACT, our plans for the Novo Naselje cultural center were included in Novi Sad's candidacy application for the European Capital of Culture, which it won in 2016.

DECENTRALIZING IMPACT

After working in the fields of culture, participation, and education for several years, we can say that we've now come really close to realizing our mission. The city of Novi Sad has decided to further develop our strategy of decentralizing and disseminating cultural content at the local level through placing Cultural Stations in different parts of the city. These stations will work in direct synergy with local communities to produce and place new cultural content. Our project thus evolved into part of the official urban plans of the city of Novi Sad. Meanwhile, Novo Kulturno Naselje also consulted on the design process for realizing all the cultural and creative needs of local neighborhoods all across the city. The final result and 3D model for the future cultural center in Novi Sad was rated as "a step forward in the design of cultural facilities intended for the local community" by Gradnja, one of the leading Serbian portals for architecture and construction. As the Gradnja article highlights, at the heart of the facility's concept is a call for togetherness and the production of new values and ideas that take physical form through the construction of a building.

Today, Novo Kulturno Naselje is one of the leading NGOs in the field of culture not only in Novi Sad but in all of Serbia. From 2014 through today, the organization has successfully conducted 17 festivals and over 1100 cultural workshops and events, including volunteer and humanitarian actions, public space interventions, and several international projects. Novo Kulturno Naselje is part of several domestic and international networks and has won a number of awards, proving that bottom-up initiatives can be successful in developing countries. Indeed, our members are frequently invited to share our knowledge and experience as well as motivate others to make a change in their own communities and surroundings.

Given the rising interest in cultural activism across the entire region, we are committed to providing support wherever culture workers are advocating for the public interest. We collectively need to build a more just cultural policy that is in the public interest and which includes local residents from the very beginning, much as we did with the Novo Naselje cultural center. Such stories can only successfully unfold when project organizers and their communities share a sense of trust and cooperation that can be nurtured over time.

PIONEERS IN PUBLIC SPACE

BY SILVIU MEDEŞAN & LALA PANAIT*

Scaling Up Strategic Grassroots Activism

*Silviu Medeşan: architect, researcher and urban activist

Lala Panait: anthropologist, urban activist and member of Colectiv A association

In 2012, we were part of a local team who initiated *La Terenuri: Spațiu Comun în Mănăștur* (At the Playgrounds: Common Space in Mănăștur), an urban intervention in the Mănăștur neighbourhood of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Begun as a two-year European Landscape Choreography project with partners in Germany and Italy, La Terenuri continued through 2019 thanks to national and municipal cultural funds, with lasting consequences and impacts through today.

The aim of the project was to raise awareness about participatory decision making while saving a vacant neighborhood lot so that it could be transformed into valuable green community space. In order to show how the area might become a local hotspot for leisure, we organized cultural and community events, including a neighbourhood festival; hands-on workshops with university students and residents; and petitions, performances, and protests that promoted the site's potential as a green democratic space. We also organized residents to collectively imagine different scenarios for how the site might look and function in the future. These diverse activities were the first step in promoting participatory urbanism in the neighbourhood.

A FAILED PROJECT?
PARTICIPATORY BEFORE ITS TIME

In 2015, we were selected to be part of the Actors of Urban Change program with a project that collaborated with neighborhood residents to transform an old cinema in Mănăștur into a community and cultural space. Pragmatically speaking, we wanted to move some outdoor activities into an indoor space during winter and have a full year of activation together with the local community. And yet, our project failed. Back in 2015, participation was not yet a buzzword for local decision makers. Since then, the idea of participatory planning has gained traction in Cluj, but too often it gets used as superficial PR for projects instead of being any meaningful invitation for citizens to gain control over how we build and grow our cities.

Once we realized that we were on our own and city authorities were not fully committed to participatory planning, we started to work on empowering local groups of residents directly. After 2-3 years of working in the neighbourhood, we made connections with local journalists, NGOs, and very active citizens who wanted change in their district. The annual neighbourhood festival emerged from our collaborations with these local residents and we also succeeded in launching a local newspaper together. In our meetings, we formed a diverse group of concerned citizens that met up in local bars and pizzerias in the absence of any official spaces that would host us. These meetings also helped us realize our initial mistake: we had failed to understand that working with city authorities required a more formal tone and less activist appearance (at least on the surface). Obtaining the free spaces and community centers that our neighborhood craved would require operating more within bureaucratic and legal norms.

SUCCESSFUL CO-CREATION

The peak of our collaboration with the local community happened in 2018, when we co-organized an event along a stream that linked the La Terenuri vacant lot with Cinema Dacia. Street artists worked hand in hand with local teenagers to co-produce street art; architecture and landscape architecture students worked with residents to make the stream banks more accessible by designing and building a bridge; and local NGOs organized recycling workshops with residents. These synergies convinced the municipality to announce a project to transform the La Terenuri area into a public park and build an accompanying sports facility.

Cornelia, one of the original gardeners from the 70s, explaining how new development at La Terenuri affects the community gardens, 2021. Photo: Radu Gaciu

In 2019, we realized that this group of citizens were ready to organize their own festival without any assistance. Even though the loss of control and responsibility for our work was emotionally difficult for us as initiators, the 7th edition of Mănăștur's Neighborhood Days was fully organized by the residents. Never could we have imagined in our first years of community activism that our work would go so far.

We understood that the city is actually produced by a sum of interests that are not always equal, and that the civic actors and the local community are often the most vulnerable and less powerful of players.

SETBACKS AND PAINFUL LESSONS

Unfortunately, just as plans for redeveloping the urban space of La Terenuri unfolded, a new private real estate development was also proposed for a neighboring green space occupied by dozens of community gardens since the 1970s. Construction of this thirteen-story building began in April 2020—when residents were in full lockdown due to COVID—and was accompanied by demolition of some of the gardens. This was the moment we understood that the city is actually produced by a sum of interests that are not always equal, and that the civic actors and the local community are often the most vulnerable and less powerful of players.

A further painful lesson came in 2021, when one of us (Lala) accepted the challenge to work in the city hall of Brașov, a mid-sized Transylvanian city to where she relocated. This was an activist "trojan horse" endeavor inside an institution with new political directions: she worked inside the Community Innovation department to develop new ways of working within the city, bridging sustainable relations between civil society, local communities, and the municipality. After being inside the system and struggling in a very difficult work environment, she realized she could do better on the community's side. After all, we imagined and created all the activist practices, stories and true meeting spaces by thinking freely.

COMMON CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this journey, we realized that our hopes and dreams for cities do not always coincide with those of the authorities, and perhaps even of some citizens. These differences are rooted in the bureaucratic and strategic concerns of present politics. The sustainable dreams we have for our cities don't always fit easily within current visions for urban development and suggest why we were never seen as legitimate within the eyes of local authorities. This lack of legitimation is a serious issue which should be discussed more within urban activist circles. We learned in time, however, not to be naive and to translate our goals to better match the political intentions of those in power. This is especially challenging when we hold leftist values but live and work in comparatively right-wing cities. We found we were often exhausted in our efforts to work with the authorities and that our ideas suffered in our unequal relationships with them. Actors of Urban Change helped us to scale up our grassroots activism and work more strategically in our city, teaching us how to let go of some fights in favor of pursuing more constructive directions and saving our energies for the long term.

As we look to the future, we envision an ideal type of urban activist: less entrepreneurial, more communitarian, and agile enough to undertake effective work with sometimes hostile political partners without sacrificing themselves or their values. It is important to both know your own limits and recognize that you cannot "save" the city on your own. The work of citymaking has to be carried out by communities together with their activists, and by bringing local authorities on board.

As urban pioneers, we may regularly feel disappointed, and sometimes, even helpless. However, we continue to strive for more ethical and equitable production of urban space, hoping to see our ideas and intentions put in practice and embraced, not just by the authorities but also by citizens and communities.

FROM ACADEMIA TO ACTIVISM

A personal impact Story

BY Dr. BANU PEKOL*

*Berghof Foundation, Columbia University Fellow on Historical Dialogue and Accountability, Global Diplomacy Lab member

One rarely finds oneself in Siberia standing on top of an abandoned factory. Looking through the pollution, I saw a city that had been both an important gulag center during Stalinist times as well as an industrial powerhouse of the region. Having climbed up multiple flights of dusty stairs with constant warnings to avoid certain steps and corners, I was reminded that the industrial character of the city is now a part of its past. But that wouldn't be the end of this building's story. Looking away from the city, towards my companions who had come from around Europe to visit this project here in Krasnoyarsk, I was met with looks of excitement and mischief. Inspired by the creative enterprises and entrepreneurs we had met in the city, we all were fantasizing about all the potential new uses that this building by the Yenisei river could have, including artist residencies, community gardens, coproduction halls, performance spaces, and more.

This sort of urban brainstorming was at the core of Actors of Urban Change (ACT), a multi-year journey that we embarked upon together with participants from nine other cities. ACT led us through multiple capacity building sessions as we all worked to make a difference in various aspects of urban change within our cities. The long time frame of the program, complemented by the insights we gained and opportunities revealed along the way, also made change inevitable in both our professional and personal lives.

TRANSFORMATION

At the beginning of my ACT journey, I was a full-time assistant professor. Two years later, I was a full-time NGO manager. Looking back, ACT was a major factor in my transitioning from pure academia to scholarly activism. I had previous experience working in the third sector, beginning with volunteering at an NGO in my first term as an undergraduate student. And yet, the transition from working inside the strict institutional framework of academia to managing an NGO with neither hierarchies nor limits to my engagement was still a very challenging process.

In 2014, I led the Turkish side of a project called Faces of Remembrance, an international youth project on cultural memory that took place in Weimar in collaboration with Klassik Stiftung Weimar and Stiftung Zollverein. I was intrigued as to whether such genuine examples of a culture of remembrance—like public places, buildings, and monuments with all of their social and cultural attributes—could be achieved in Istanbul, a city with layers of a difficult past. This idea lay dormant, as I continued to research the theme academically until the Actors of Urban Change call for participants landed in my inbox.

The practices of planning, engaging, and acting in academia do not at all resemble those in activism. Additionally, one needs many new hard and soft skills to succeed, including strategy development, advocacy, communication, and volunteer engagement. It's essential to pay attention to diversity and inclusion, be proactive, and prepare for the multiple and constant challenges that the third sector faces, including financial instability, political opposition, and organizational changes. And of course, there's also more work to be done than there are hours in the day!

Over the three years of my ACT journey (thanks to an extension grant to collaborate with an earlier ACT cohort project in Greece), I expanded my professional toolkit to be able to tackle all such challenges and more. But the experience also expanded my vision of what

was possible. In academia, the pressure to publish original research drives you deeper into your niche, frequently leaving you disconnected from urgent socio-political challenges. With ACT, I broke this habit and kept thinking of the wider picture and how my work could change and benefit cities and their inhabitants while ensuring that culture and creativity remained at the center of urban life.

STRENGTH THROUGH DIVERSITY

Being part of a larger team of ten cities enabled me to think beyond social, cultural, sectoral, and national boundaries. All teams were affected in one way or another by complex urban challenges throughout their journey, ranging from stakeholder engagement to infrastructural changes. What we shared on our journey were the support and guidance we received over the two years through ACT academy meetings, internships, and collaborative workshops that encouraged us to capitalize on the diverse backgrounds of our teams. Differences in background, skill, and resources—not to mention social and cultural differences—are sometimes imagined as a breeding ground for conflicts. However, purposefully building our group and our projects to straddle all these boundaries enabled us to think transformatively and facilitate positive change across them.

ACTING IN THE FACE OF UPHEAVAL

Our ACT project in Istanbul worked to preserve the culture and heritage of a former Greek neighbourhood called Tatavla. We organized multiple participatory actions with the community and undertook accompanying research, with the project culminating in a public exhibition. There were, however, drastic changes unfolding in Turkey between the time we drafted the project concept and the end of our two-year engagement. Numerous terrorist attacks, political instability, an attempted coup and resulting state of emergency, the expulsion of hundreds of scholars from their posts, and a rigged referendum resulting in a regime change were just some examples of the radical upheaval we witnessed. These events affected our daily lives, careers, and the project. Our periodic meetings with students were interrupted as many families moved to rural areas to avoid terrorism. Some of the students were totally demoralized and unable to work on the project any further.

Such challenges would have caused a traditional scholar to retreat back into the safe bubble of academia. Looking back, it had the reverse effect on me and inspired me to become even more determined to stand my ground and make a difference in the face of political oppression. I wholeheartedly embraced my activist-scholar identity, handed in my resignation from my post at the university (which was the most prestigious, secure and well-paid job I had ever had) and teamed up with my ACT teammate Cagla to manage our NGO. The rest is history. In the five years since Cagla and I founded our project, our NGO has received international recognition and multiple prestigious cultural heritage grants.
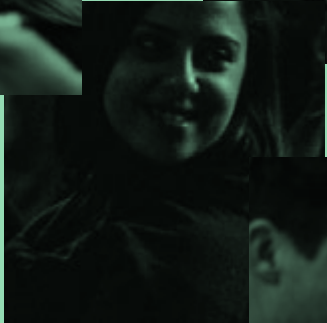
LOOKING BACK

In retrospect, my move from academia to the third sector—considered career suicide by the majority of my peers—was the best thing I could do with my life. Experiencing a program like ACT, meanwhile, helped me see that I was not alone in my passion for tackling cultural and social challenges. By believing and investing in smart actors, ACT created a network of changemakers oriented towards creating sustainable, participatory, and inclusive solutions for our cities.

Everything snowballed from there. The exhibition I curated as the end product of our engagement with ACT in Istanbul and Athens made me realize that I was good at creatively expressing difficult issues. That in turn led me to undertake other creative exhibitions, ranging from the personal nature of peacebuilding to multicultural storytelling within historic buildings.

For anyone reading this and considering a change of career or sector, I would absolutely encourage making such a change. Anytime we feel a pull on our career trajectory so powerful that it sweeps us off our feet, we should be open to such change. Allowing ourselves the freedom and space to be transformed by a new field is priceless. In my case, it even led to me pitching the EU parliament to allocate more funding for cultural heritage.

Past

Present

Future

EXPLORE ADAPT

BY ANDREAS KNOTH*

TRANS FORM

Process and Structure-Based Answers to Complexity and Crisis

Acknowledging complexity means letting go of simplifications. The great modernist delusion of "managed development"—be it urban, organizational, or personal—is one such simplification that progressively went out the window over the last few decades. The development of complex open systems is really not "manageable" in the sense of determining trajectories and outcomes. It is more of a wild rodeo than a smooth drive. It is an adventure. As the idea of manageability has given way to a more realistic paradigm, however, the counter-delusion of unmanageability is creeping in from the edges. Have things gotten too complex to handle? Is it all up to fate? Are we adrift, or can we still navigate?

PLAYING WITH COMPLEXITY: FROM ADAPTATION TO TRANSFORMATION

Of course we can. Thanks to research on complex systems and the rise of Agile practice, we have the concepts and tools to work in messy environments. As Dave Snowden lays out, probe (try a move), sense (take note of how it lands), and respond (adjust accordingly). The name of the current strategy, then, is "exploratory adaptation."

Adaptation is one key aspect of resilience. The ability to adapt to changing environmental conditions allows systems to survive in crisis. Adaptive movement is undoubtedly better suited to meet current challenges than the old school "long range planning" routine, but it does have one flaw: adaptation deemphasizes the possibility of actively influencing said changing environmental conditions. Do we have to give up our ambitions and visions as we cast aside planning and roadmapping? Can we look forward with an open mind and still passionately shape and transform our world?

Again, the answer should be yes, we can. Or rather, we must! The concept of transformation is annoyingly mystified. In most simple terms, it is defined as a process of fundamental and permanent change. "Fundamental" can be translated as holistic and multilayered, that is, transformation of both context and self. "Permanent," meanwhile, describes a shift from one paradigm to another. The future state is not always known, but it is profoundly different from the present, and it is there to stay (until further notice, of course).

TRANSFORMATIVE SCENARIO PLANNING

In search of workable formats for this profound shift, Adam Kahane proposed the Transformative Scenario Planning (TSP) process. TSP is a multi-stakeholder exercise to map plausible future scenarios and build momentum for a joint stretch towards the most desirable future. A number of alternative scenarios are developed around a set of "critical uncertainties," factors that greatly influence our field of concern but are hard to forecast in their development. The transformative quality of the process relates to a shift of perspectives and relationships among the engaged players as well as a change in the external field of focus. For this, the process establishes a strategic intent, a plausible projection of what a positive future can look like. With this grounded vision, the adaptive movement gains traction to become more than just a passive reaction. Working through a TSP process is not a guarantee for sustainable impact, but it certainly is a whole lot more promising and energizing than trying to just roll with the punches while adjusting to new manifestations of the problem.

TRANSFORMATIVE STRUCTURES

Transformation is process based, which in itself is a burden: if everything is process, constantly shifting and flowing, people tend to get lost. If there is no home base, no shelter to retreat to, then the world out there becomes a source of constant struggle, and in extreme cases, a panic zone.
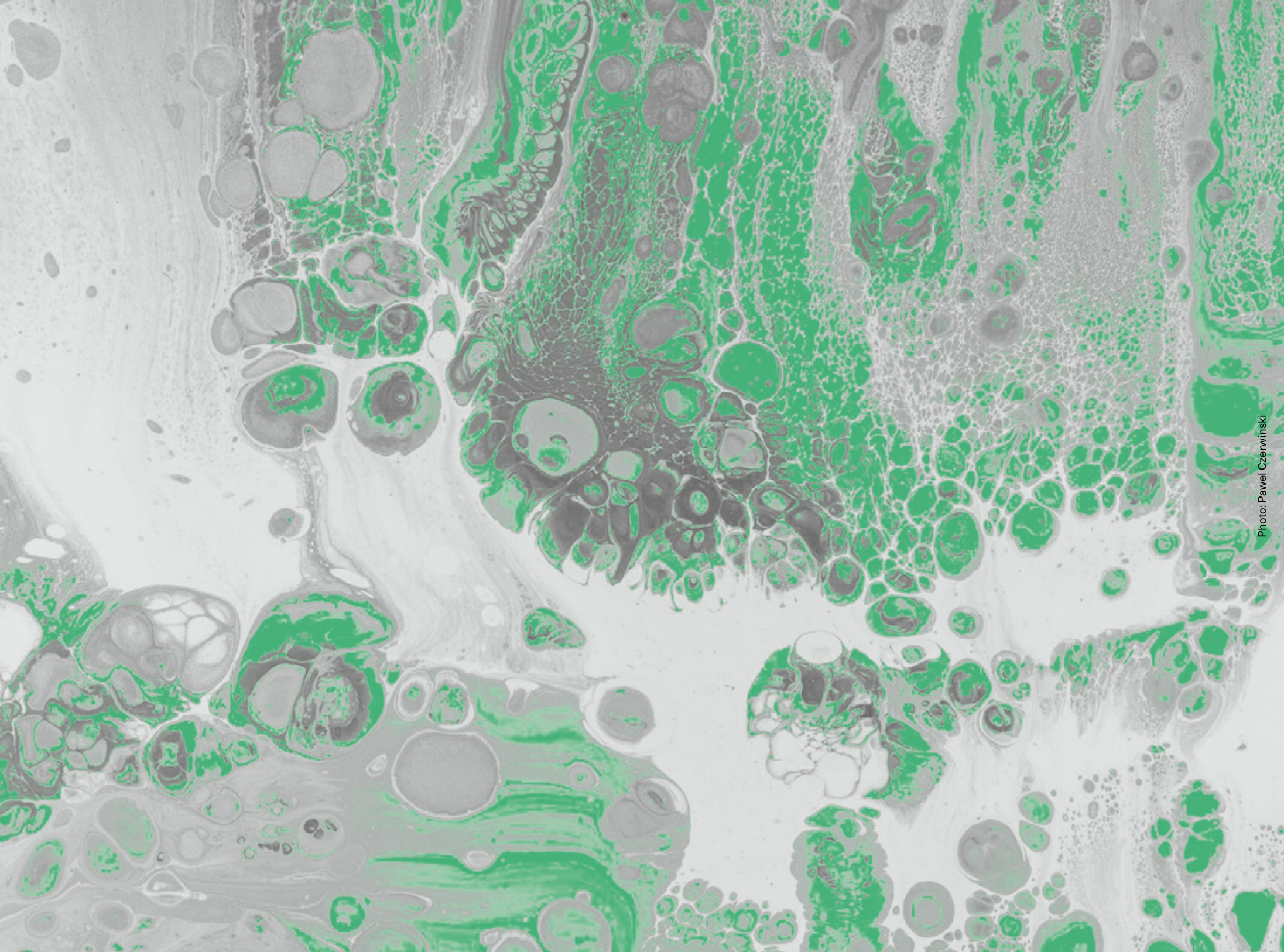
So what is a convincing "stable body" for the transformative stance, given that change comes along with creative destruction and crisis? How do we structure containers that shelter and at the same time transform us and the world around us? Is the good old "organization" still the best answer? Do classic institutions have the transformative capacity needed to tackle our wicked problems? On the other end of the spectrum: can open communities and social movements provide the stable zones we need to thrive and regenerate?

Unfortunately, the structural aspect of transformation is still underexplored. Let us look at two transformative configurations that stuck out in the COVID Universe. Following the work of philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, we might call them "the bubble" and "the foam."[1]

THE BUBBLE

The bubble follows the idea of a closed system, a sealed sphere protected from the tempest and contained to conserve its atmosphere. Its membrane is designed to reduce complexity and limit impulses to and from the outside world. It is resilient, not because it adapts, but because it withdraws. The bubble is a space of focused relationships. Purpose-based communities and collectives can have bubble qualities. Built as "islands of sanity," they act as hermetic spheres of self-development and utopian incubation. In the best case they become greenhouses for new microsystems.

Unlike a guerilla gardening intervention, which sits in public space to radiate inspiration, the transformative impact of the bubble is only realized when its elements reenter the bigger "mother

(1)   This discussion of course does not fully capture Sloterdijk's original line of thought regarding these two categories. If you are interested, do check out his 2,500-page *Spheres Trilogy*!

system." Up to that point, transformation mainly takes place within. For example, during COVID, a good portion of initiatives and organizations drew the blanket closer and hibernated in their bubbles. Some of them came out transformed with new ideas and momentum for social change. Others turned into echo chambers in which cross-boundary sensemaking remained difficult. Bubbles have transformative capacity, but not every bubble ends up being transformative.

THE FOAM

The foam, in contrast, builds on connectedness and movement. It is made up of smaller bubbles that form organically evolving constellations. A foam is an open system. In organisational terms it is looser than a network, which implies little more common purpose and collective functioning. Each bubble in a foam remains its own sovereign entity and follows its own rationale. Yet, the foam is more than just a pile of sand on the sidewalk. It is a plural sphere of co-evolving units among which a common purpose can emerge.

In times of crisis, the foam turns out to be extremely resilient. To understand this resilient quality, we need to shift our understanding from static to dynamic stability. While the classic idea of stability is associated with tight coupling (things are mounted together so firmly that they can weather almost any storm), there is another kind of stability which is associated with the ability to bend rather than break. Reeds are dynamically stable, as are high-tech construction materials that work with pliable foundations.

In social systems, dynamic stability is created through the loose coupling of units. Loose coupling means that subsystems are not tied together by command and control but rather by lateral coordination and negotiation. Instead of static rules and regulations, they

are coordinated by principles or cultural norms. If an organization or a network has to adhere to conflicting stakeholder spheres or is exposed to very turbulent environments, loose coupling is the way to secure adaptive integration. It also prevents knock-on effects in crises, as local struggles and solutions become learning opportunities for the whole system, thus making it stronger under stress.

Foam structures can be found in organisational ecosystems and networked communities. As their common purposes emerge, their transformative natures become more obvious. This is just half of the story, however. It is the *unintentional* nature of foams that allows for innovative solutions. Foams are shapeshifting and continuously refining their configurations in a series of evolutionary steps as bubbles enter and exit and as relationships and collective action patterns change in response to internal and external dynamics. Each foam state resembles a preliminary order, that is, an arrangement that *could* be final but can also be reconfigured from moment to moment. Even if there are key players driving the process, the foam is collective and emergent. And while foam is transient in nature, the transformative power of foams is grounded in exactly this dynamic prototyping quality. Once a foam arrangement has reached a state of refinement and has proven to "work" in regard to a specific function, it becomes a blueprint for the system's further development. In evolutionary terms, the foam innovates while the system replicates and scales that innovation to an effective level.

TRANSFOAMATION

During the pandemic crisis, the need for solidarity and peer support, the apparent wickedness and complexity of global challenges, the exploration of new collaborative strategies, and the explosion of virtual collaboration all contributed to foaming in the community and

civil society sector. The transformative impact of this development is already visible. Its sustainability remains to be observed.

The bubble and the foam are just two possible transformative structures. Social change requires many different ones. Some focus on either fixing or fighting the established system. Some focus on incubating and releasing new alternative microsystems. And some act as containers for self-transformation. Not a single one will succeed by itself; all are needed to co-shape a sustainable transformation. So let's keep exploring.

The 2019-2021 Actors of Urban Change group found themselves faced with quite a dose of complexity and uncertainty in the pandemic crisis. Each team had to find their balance between adaptation and transformation and developed their own structural answers along the way. We introduced elements of the Transformative Scenario Planning process to support them in both this challenge and their quest to strengthen resilience and impact. You will find the fascinating accounts of their journeys in the following pages.

projects
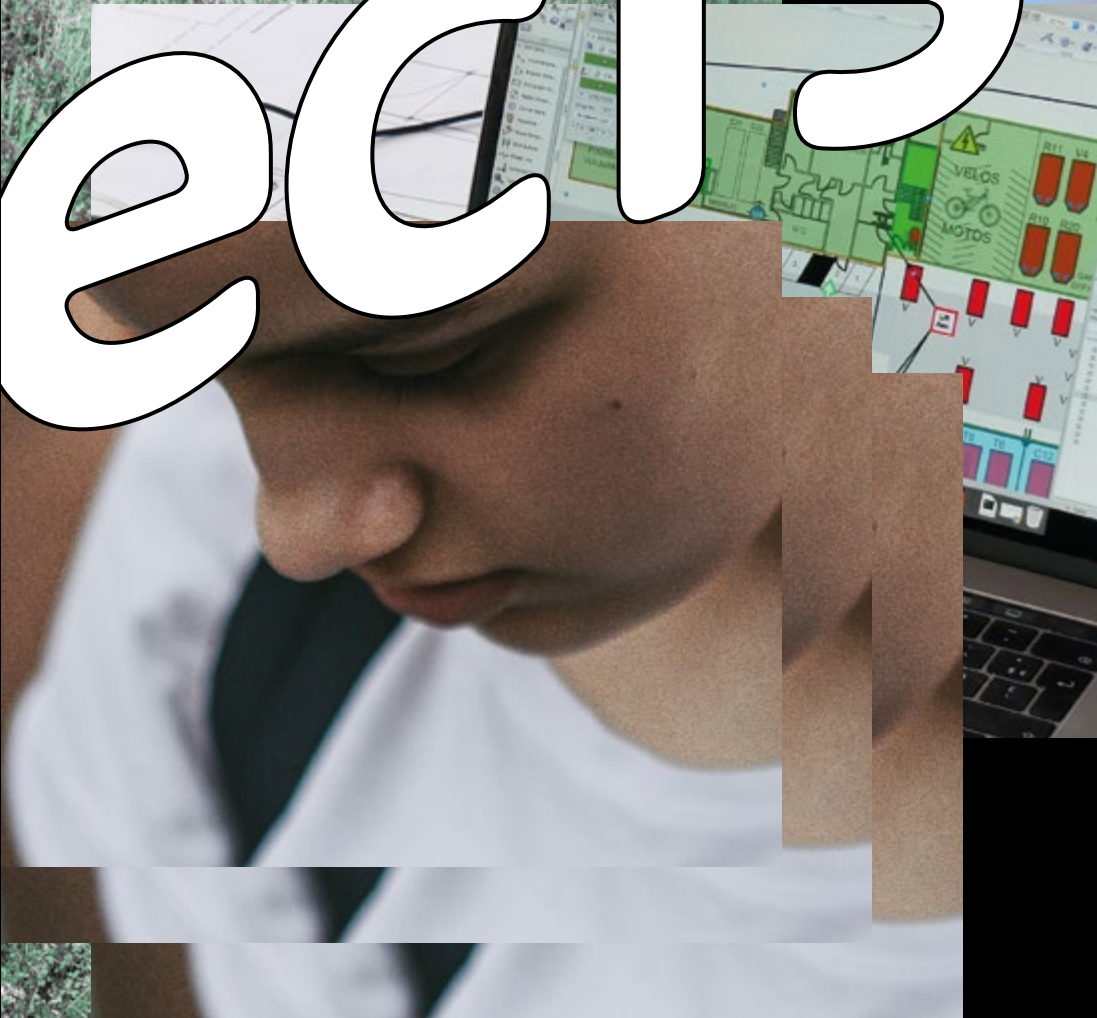
I joined the ACT teams' journeys rather late—in early 2021, when I started supporting the program's social media work—and had only gotten to know the participants and their projects on a superficial level. But that changed completely when I had the opportunity to interview all ten teams for this section of the magazine in which we'll introduce you to their stories.

After more than a year and a half of social distancing to varying extents and increasing numbers of online meetings, I was still surprised about the emotional responses I had while listening to the team members describing their projects, their motivations, and the processes they went through.

As I listened and gained deep insights into their projects, team processes and personal relationships, I had the strong impression that adapting to the limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic had brought a new level of relationship to the teams.

The new situation we all faced required a lot of flexibility and openness to change. Almost all of the teams had to adapt their initial goals and concepts quite strongly to the new circumstances: live events were mostly impossible to organize and not all formats could be easily converted to an online version. Often, target groups did not have access to the equipment needed to make virtual events a success, or, on a more fundamental level, teams hadn't yet established enough contact with their groups and so it was harder to reach out

to people. As most of the teams were working closely with public institutions that were not able to keep working during lockdowns, appointments and cooperation became complicated.

More than ever, it became important to have strong communication skills while discussing new problems, to be able to handle frustrations while letting creativity flow, and to have the flexibility to come up with new ideas and solutions.

Having signed up for a program that is primarily about the direct exchange between urban change-makers and their peers through in-person events, the teams had to adapt to online formats and spend even more time in front of screens.

Yet despite these obstacles, I was truly amazed by how passionately the teams still talked about their experiences. It was more than touching to hear the individual team members talk about each other, expressing appreciation and gratitude for having gone through this process together, for staying open to changes, for sharing insecurities and pain, and for treating each other with respect and the deepest of trust. Their words resonated with a deeper connection amongst them, often beyond the professional level.

Quite surely, this is the case for most projects that are based on shared values and visions for a better future and social change. The drive and motivation can be endless if what you are aiming for matches your idea of a better world. And yet, the extraordinary circumstances that all of us have faced these past 18 months also brought us to points of exhaustion that then somehow led us to connect on a more personal level, supporting and caring for each other when needed.

I'd like to express my gratitude for this round's teams: for not giving up and for staying flexible, for transforming ideas into actions, and for giving me an intimate insight into their experiences.

Lisa Wahl

Box for Expression

Athens GR

The "Box for Expression" is an installation that supports storytelling and sharing experiences in the open space of the city. The infrastructure is a box externally covered with mirrors: reflecting the landscape where it is hosted, it creates an aesthetic harmony with its surrounding environment, while reflecting the subjects approaching it—thus inviting them to an introspection process through experiencing its action.

Team Athens designed and constructed the material infrastructure of the box and created a concept for its first use, the Public Toilet of Thoughts: an open invitation to co-create a sharing process where the physical space of the city will be fed with thoughts, narratives, sounds, and images of our social imaginary. The project includes a digital space where the collected audio data and project information are published. In its first actions in public space at three different Athenian districts, the box recorded and uploaded more than 250 narratives.

Social distancing due to the pandemic came to intensify the social isolation of the contemporary urban space. We wanted to create a symbolic space connecting the passer-by with the neighborhood and the community that inhabits it.

ACT   You must have gotten a lot of different answers from passers-by within the implementation phase of your project. What surprised you the most?

ISMINI   What fascinated me during the implementation was how people used the structure that we arranged, mainly how children interacted with the interface of the box in public space. We didn't know how they would react. It was an experiment and for me it was a nice surprise how children played with it.

Nonprofit sector
ALEXANDRA TZANIDOU
OPEN LAB ATHENS
GIANNIS ZGERAS OPEN LAB ATHENS

Private sector
ELENI
MASTROGEORGOPOULOU
LUDD/PRACTA

Public sector
ISMINI GATOU
UNIVERSITY OF THE AEGEAN, DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNICATION—IMAGE, SOUND AND CULTURAL REPRESENTATION LAB (ISCRL)

ACT   Is there one specific answer that you still remember?

ISMINI   Oh yes. One question was: *How did you spend your time in the house during lockdown?* Some children were so happy and one child answered, *I was turning music on and I was dancing in my living room*. It was such a different answer from the ones the adults gave. This was nice and it really helped me, and I think it can help all of us somehow by giving us another perspective to things.

GIANNIS   One person told me that the box reminded her of a situation in her childhood: her mother used to tell her that whenever she had nightmares, she should go tell the nightmare to the toilet and then flush. It was a nice surprise to see that the participants had similar associations, like a collective memory, but this time bringing this usage to a public space.

ACT   Which role did the pandemic play in your project?

ALEXANDRA   At one point we decided to base the whole project on the situation. The implementation phase happened after the first lockdown. People felt more secure to move around again, so social interaction was not that weird.

It was nice to see that they wanted to use the facilities of the Toilet of Thoughts in order to throw away bad memories of the COVID times.

I remember one moment when we were explaining to people what the box was about. Giannis was describing the box to an old lady. What he told her was

that the Toilet of Thoughts was sort of like a "free psychologist" with the help of technology. Ismini described the box as something magical that would help you to deal with problems. Both are true. We got a lot of good feedback from passers-by.

ACT   What were the most important lessons you learned during the whole process?

ISMINI   For me the most important lesson was to realize again that interdisciplinary projects have so many advantages. People from different fields working together. It is always better because you can build up on an idea in a way that cannot happen when you only work with people in your field. It may get more in-depth in some ways, but you miss this dialog and exchange that for me makes a huge difference. Though it can also be difficult, as it needs more time and energy. But it always depends on the people. For me this specific team was like a dream in terms of collaboration!

ACT   You are all specialized in different fields. How did you manage to balance your ideas and inputs?

ALEXANDRA   It happened as a natural process I would say. We didn't really follow any methods or anything else. It was making two steps front, one step back, and finding the project somewhere in the middle.

ELENI   To me the keyword to this question is trust. So whenever we were not reaching an agreement easily, we ended up going with the person who was the most experienced in the concerning field and trusting this expertise. This means being trusted and trusting back in other moments.

IANNIS   And I will also add time. Whenever we had a disagreement, we gave time to each other. We would stop the discussion in order to to think more and leave it until the next meeting in order to bring more relaxation and calmness into the topic. All the time in the next meeting we could reach an agreement much easier. So I think this aspect of taking time was another important point to make the project as successful as it got.

ISMINI   I would like to add respect. We also have respect between us, and that gave us the time to make sure that everyone was being heard.

Team Athens

Permanent

Permanent is a practice-based research project with the aim of developing an infrastructure for permanently affordable and embedded social and cultural space in Brussels.

By investigating alternative understandings of ownership and by looking into new legal and financial models proposed by cooperatives and other "commoning" initiatives, Permanent wants to develop this much-needed infrastructure in Brussels without contributing to a process of gentrification and profit-driven urban development.

Nonprofit sector
ROB RITZEN LEVEL FIVE

Private sector
ELS SILVRANTS-BARCLAY
COMMUNITY LAND TRUST BRUSSELS

Public sector
LYNN TYTGAT
VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT BRUSSEL
—WEKONEKT

Brussels BE

ACT What was your personal motivation behind the project?

ELS I think it has to do with the fact that we are currently in yet another wave of institutional critique in the arts. And I think specifically, a lot of cultural workers and artists have come to realize that there's an issue with how we produce in the cultural scene. We all take up these progressive positions, we're all anticapitalists, we're all feminists, we're all in favor of decolonization. But then we have to acknowledge that the systems in which we produce are actually very consumption, competition, and production driven and that the institutions that we have built up are still incredibly exclusionary and white.

A key moment was when I started to realize that actually producing or performing this radical content rather kept those systems in place than really fundamentally dismantling it.

With a group of people and including myself, we started to realize that we needed to really engage with different kinds of institution building, setting up different forms of production. And that the way that we produce a space for the arts is an integral part of that. We need to come to terms with the unwanted side effects of cultural spatial production: how museums are being used as flagships in gentrification processes, how temporary use for artists is doing the same, how we are often favored over other groups and how we need to come up with different models to produce our need for space. Because we need space. Otherwise we cannot work, or we cannot present work. We cannot share it with audiences. But to do it in a different way, that's a bit where it connects with where I come from and where I'm trying to come to terms with some of the issues in our fields that are not quite doing what we want them to do.

ACT Was there a specific method you were following?

ELS We want to realize this mixed-use infrastructure in a bottom-up, grassroot way, and through this, set up the conditions for certain actors—including ourselves—to partake in an urban development they are otherwise so often excluded from. But that's really complex, especially as we are dealing with different subjectivities, different languages, different privileges as well. One thing we hold on to is to try not to speak "in the name of." So we would not only invite the coordinators of our different partners, but also the people they work for and with, such as the families that are on the waiting lists of the Community Land Trust. That's a good strategy, I think, because very often we talk about or on behalf of communities, but we hardly ever talk to the people that are actually in these communities.

ACT Name a lesson learned!

ELS The importance of going through this crisis of trying to do things. It is about making mistakes in how you co-create. It's really important today to try by doing instead of talking about it. To allow yourselves to o make mistakes and learn from that. To also use crisis as a learning moment, and to also take the responsibility of engaging with the slippery slopes that are out there—to talk with policymakers, even when they might be seduced by your sexy content and they can easily instrumentalize you.

ROB One lesson I learned: It's always going to be more work than you think. And of course you have to work with the ambition and imagination of what it can be. And it's always going to be a bumpy road to get there and it's going to take longer, but in those moments you also learn and if you can do that together, the final project will also be better. So that's what I learned from the trajectory now.
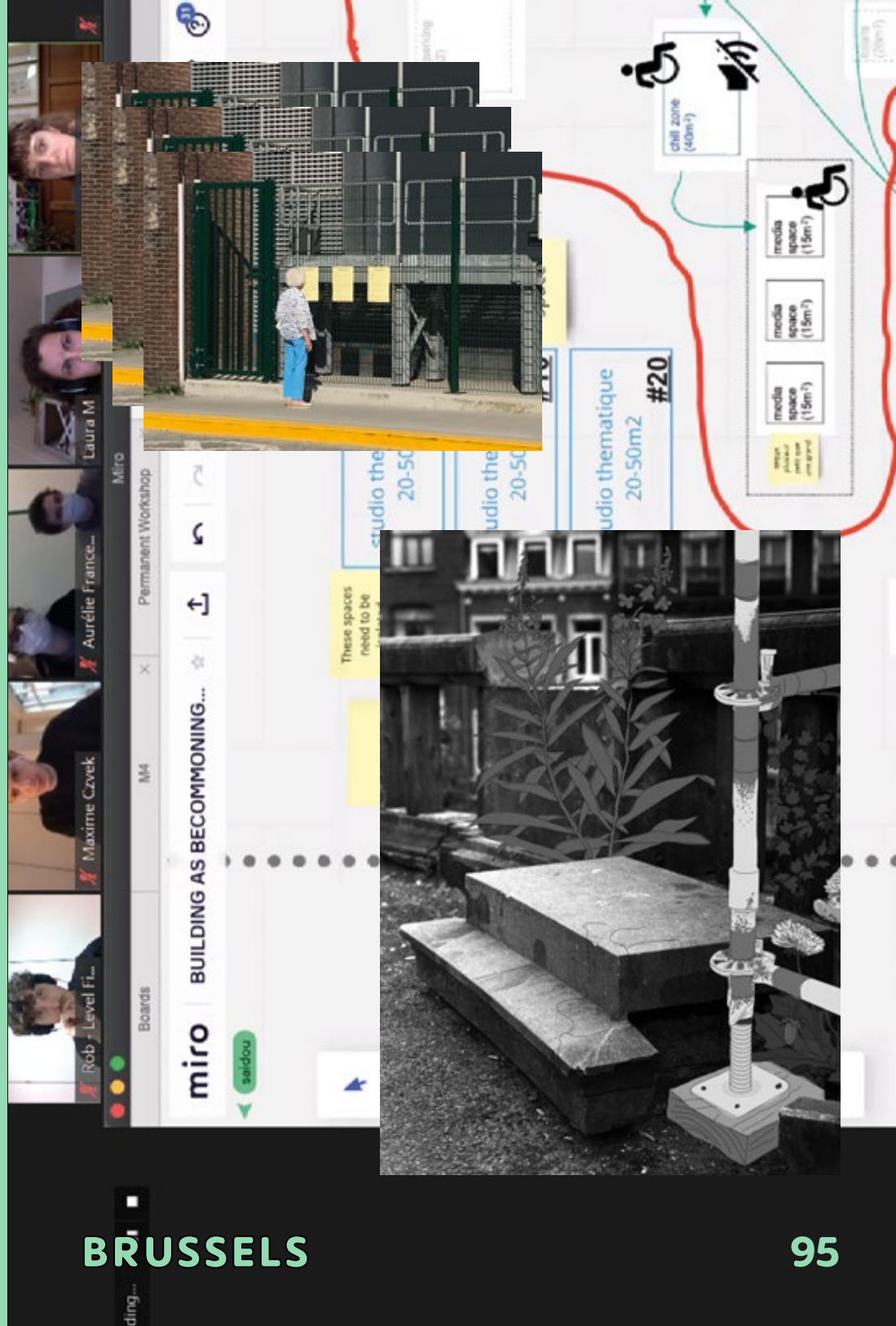
My Space Nugle Bugojno BA

My Space Nugle activated the space located in the urban area between the residential buildings of Nugle neighborhood, creating a recreation space by actively involving the citizens to participate in the design and construction process, thus raising the feeling of collective ownership.

The team actively involved residents from the early stages of design through workshops, meetings and consultations, and open dialogue. Based on all collected data from the residents and participants themselves, as well as the recommendations of experts in the field of architecture and urban planning, the team created a detailed project documentation which was adopted by the city and informed the construction phase.

Team Bugojno

Nonprofit sector
TIDZA CAUSEVIC
YOUTH ASSOCIATION BUGOJNO
AMRA DURIĆ ČAUŠEVIĆ
YOUTH CENTER BUGOJNO

Private sector
AMRA COLIC PUBLIC COMPANY
FOR RESIDENTIAL UTILITIES AND LOCAL
ROADS BUGOJNO

Public sector
NEDIM BALIHODZIC
MUNICIPALITY OF BUGOJNO

ACT   How did you involve citizens within your project?

TEAM BUGOJNO   In the first phase, we planned workshops on site to analyze the area, to find out what they see, what they like, what they don't like, and what they wish for. We were using placemaking tools for that. Because of COVID, we could not do gatherings with more people, but outdoor events could still happen. There were young people, elderly people, and kids. We asked some questions so we could gather data in order to design the project concept and then involved designers and architects.

That is something that is really missing in Bosnia: to involve people from the beginning. They are usually involved toward the end, when everything is almost decided.

But as people are not used to being involved, we needed to give them some food for thought—then they actually started thinking about it and realized what possibilities there are. In our case, that meant asking twice. A typical conversation would be like this:

"Do you really want to have the parking space right in front of your house?" "Yes, I need a parking space for my car." "But wouldn't it be nicer if you had a park in front of our houses in order to spend time outside, to create space for our kids to play?"

And then they would start to think about it and say "Yes, totally. Let's move our cars somewhere else. We need outside spaces for us to gather, to live, to enjoy."

ACT   Why do you think they did not consider these options in the first place?

TEAM BUGOJNO   People here don't believe that they themselves have the power to do something. They expect that someone from the government will come and take care of things and tell them how it is done. This is how it was during socialist times. There was no access to decision-making processes. So they were not sure about our approach of involvement because they did not know it yet. They were not sure if their opinions were really going to be taken into consideration.

After the documentation, the presentation to the mayor, and the actual work started, people approached us and finally built trust and wanted to get involved more. Even though it was not easy, I would say: involving people from the beginning is key.

We hope that our project will actually show that it is important to involve people from the beginning and that it is on us as citizens to make decisions about what we want and present it to the government.

ACT   What were the most important lessons learned from the project?

TEAM BUGOJNO   I learned to be patient. This process of changing mindsets in our area of the Balkans is very slow. People expect to see things done overnight or immediately. If nothing happens soon, they distrust and get sceptical and think they wasted their time. So if we manage to involve them constantly and over a longer period of time, they will see the results and improvements, and they will start to appreciate what we are all doing for the common good of our community and eventually join us.

For The LOVE of Greece
Epirus/Athens ^GR

Nonprofit sector
SOPHIE LAMPROU
IMPACT HUB ATHENS

Private sector
ATHENA SPYRIDAKI
PATAGONIA

Public sector
LIDA TSENE
HELLENIC OPEN UNIVERSITY

For The Love of Greece is an alternative environmental campaign, activating public spaces through art, with the objective to inform, mobilize, and strengthen the voice of those who want to draw attention to the capitalization of Greece's natural wealth. Two large-scale murals in central Athens, painted by two of Greece 's globally renowned artists, INO and Taxis, along with digital artwork and physical posters convey "the invitation that we must protect the land we love."

Team Epirus/Athens
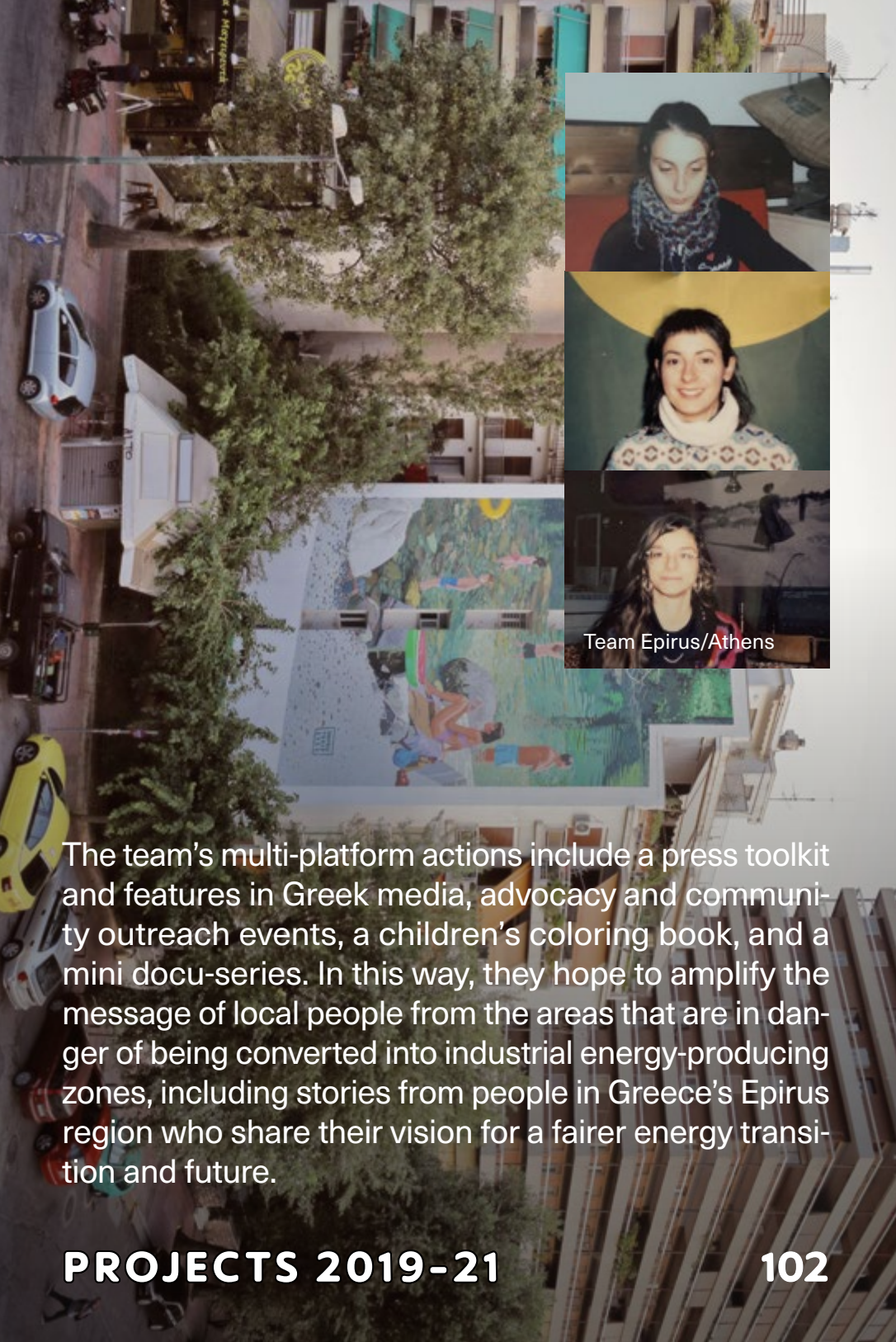
The team's multi-platform actions include a press toolkit and features in Greek media, advocacy and community outreach events, a children's coloring book, and a mini docu-series. In this way, they hope to amplify the message of local people from the areas that are in danger of being converted into industrial energy-producing zones, including stories from people in Greece's Epirus region who share their vision for a fairer energy transition and future.

ACT   What was your initial goal with the project and what actually came out in the end?

SOPHIE   Our goal did not change from the beginning to now. Our objective was to create a campaign for the urban centers where we would amplify the voices of people in the rural areas of Greece that are under pressure of becoming industrialized as the places where renewable energy industrial systems would be placed—one third of the Greek mainland would be turned into an industrialized zone.

Our main tool was art. So we were trying to use marketing approaches and mechanisms in order to make the message of the environmental movement more mainstream and more digestible for the people in the urban zones.

ACT   For you, it is important that people make informed decisions on this topic. Do you in general think there are not enough opportunities to get well-informed?

LIDA   There are different dimensions to that. One thing is that climate and energy mitigation is a concept and a practice that has ecological and political dimensions to it. That means that there are mostly particular voices that are being heard, often in a way that most people cannot understand. The terminology that is being used and also the argumentation around why we need to put different channels of energy transmissions into the mainland and the island is not very well expressed nor clearly addressed. I can tell that for myself as well. Prior to joining this project, I lacked the general picture of what is happening and why it is happening right now in our country. And if we move now to younger audiences, I think that we must find some more attractive ways of explaining what

is happening, and also to give them access to the knowledge and opportunity to make their own decisions.

So art could be used in that way: to stimulate the curiosity to know more, to ask more questions about the whole situation, and maybe also to energize them and give them the tools to be more active.

ACT   How did the activist community react to the murals? Did you get feedback yet?

SOPHIE   Especially the activist world has received them in a very positive way. They also see them as a tool that they have never used and an approach that they have never thought of before, and they also seem to be more sensitive and aware of the language and images that they have been using until now. So this gives them a new perspective to adapt their communication in the future.

ACT   Is there something you learned in your project that you would like to share or recommend to others?

SOPHIE   I think for us it was of great value to experiment with the different types of communication for social causes. And I think this is something we would like to explore further and continue applying and taking up as a skill to spread it out to more topics and issues, and taking it to the next level and to keep experimenting with that—using mainstream techniques and making a mainstream storytelling for a wider audience to come closer to a cause.

LIDA   We are also preparing a toolkit with useful material that can be applied as a communications campaign by smaller or bigger groups and communities. So we hope these will spread eventually.

Tramp Kitchen aims to create a movement to transform the food cycle from seed to table in Izmir, Turkey, into a more sustainable, common, and equitable system. Originally planned as a mobile kitchen that would cook with waste from the city's Bazaars, Team Izmir had to redesign the original project due to Covid-19 restrictions, keeping three essential components from our original project: food as an excuse to gather, mobility as a way to be flexible, and people to create a community.

The project mapped the common foods of Izmir as well as their life cycle, hosted knowledge exchanges on food production and consumption, and started investigating the relationship between food production and urbanization as an advocacy movement.

Team Izmir

Izmir TR
Tramp Kitchen

ACT The contact restrictions during the pandemic forced you to change your project activities a lot. How did you evolve the new approach?

CANSU We are all coming from different fields. So after a lot of long discussions, we decided that we first needed to reach a common ground before we can actually get active. So we decided to first understand and redescribe the terms that we use to get to the same page. So this is how the dictionary evolved.

AKIN The first plan was to bring people from the fields of ecology, economy, and social topics together over food to realize how they can tackle problems from different angles. Our adaptation to the COVID situation was: Instead of bringing a lot of people together and eating together, we started by asking questions about behaviors, about consumption, about our role in this environmental crisis, and set it in relation to each other.

ACT What was the most beautiful or surprising moment in your project?

GIZEM The happiest, healthiest, and most relaxing moment for me was going to our retreat. Going to another place with the whole team and having the time and space to discuss and exchange about the pandemic situation, our personal feelings and the changes we faced in our project was very good. I felt we really got creative and reached a good common understanding and had ideas on how to continue.

So you could say that by finding our common language, we also found our vision—and that made things a lot easier: it brought back the passion and helped us get into action.

CANSU For me, actually, the best moment was to find our common pain. It was those moments when we connected and really figured out what to do next. The hardest moment was during the pandemic; when we still had the earlier version of our project, there was this famous activist on ecology and climate change that we wanted to invite. I had a conversation with her on the phone and what she told me was: don't do a project just to do a project. So maybe sometimes it's okay to step back and just stop doing what you're doing, give it some time and see if it goes somewhere else. This was really hard because we had already worked so much until that moment, and she basically told us to throw everything away to make space for something new. But, in the end, this was also very enriching and helped us to get to the point that we are at now.

ACT What were the most important lessons learned?

AKIN I learned that when you are working on a local scale, you have to stay dynamic and flexible. Because day by day you are struggling with different things. Projects do not go in a linear way. Sometimes it goes up, sometimes it goes down, sometimes you will be stopped, and sometimes you'll lose. But you have to organize every day, again and again, and you have to see the bigger picture.

CANSU Thanks to the Actors of Urban Change program, I learned that fucking up is okay. And I also learned how to fight.

GIZEM Yeah, what I learned is—and this probably sounds a bit clichéd—but never give up. You will find a way when your values are set, but your way to reach your goal seems unclear. You can find a way to do it. You find the methods and sooner or later you can make it. Just keep going.

The Path of Memories

Team Kaisariani co-created tools that allow elderly people diagnosed with dementia to participate in decision making processes, allowing them to move safely and comfortably in public space while developing the structures of community and caregiving, by the neighborhood, for the neighborhood.

With the support of the Hellenic Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics (HAGG), the team is documenting their methodology and toolkit, making it flexible and transferrable to other cities. Together with the elderly, the caregivers, and the local community, team Kaisariani also ran awareness & demonstration activities in which symbolic interventions took place.

Kaisariani Athens GR

ACT What was your personal motivation to start a project that is focussed on people with dementia?

ALEXIA My personal motivation was actually my grandmother who started having dementia. And it's remarkable, living in a city, how fast she was trapped at home because there was no trust to let her walk around.

We got really scared that she would go around and get lost. We were not sure if our neighborhood would be a friendly place for her. So, actually, this made me aware of a topic that is spread broadly. The statistics of people having dementia or similar conditions are really huge. And our cities are not prepared for that. And that makes it very difficult for the person with dementia but also for the families around them.

VIVIAN The approach and methodology that I'm working with is placemaking. So for me, it's important that within every project that I'm doing, every case that I participate in gives me a possibility to learn through the process. Part of my learning process is also to work with different target groups.

So far I have worked with different age groups: teenagers, children and toddlers. So I think it is quite interesting to now work with the other end of the age spectrum. And then I'm trying to see how I can phrase it in a way without power dynamics, offering a platform to give voice to the invisible ones.

So in our society, it is mostly white, middle-aged, well-educated people— mostly men—who participate in politics and other participatory processes. So I am interested in finding a way to also include people who don't have the channels to raise their voice and participate.

ACT Which was your favorite moment during the project?

ALEXIA Well, the whole process really was intense. There were a lot of ups and downs and sometimes it was really hard—a lot of work and stress. But looking back, I do not see the problems. What we are left with is a very strong team that was really there for each other and that I also feel will be there for each other in the future. So I think that was the best outcome.

MANOS For me it was a year and a half continuous moment. It was a very interesting trip for me, a unique trip. And the team, I think it's unique too, the way we worked as a team. I have to say a big thank you to these two girls that helped me to feel very comfortable and very useful. They put me in a new world, a very interesting world for me. And I believe there will be next steps for us together.

One thing that triggered me is that this project was a trip to the past, mostly for the elderly people. One of them, in the same moment when this woman was singing, showed us a paper where he noted down all dates that he ever went to the movies, with date, time, title. That was stunning! So I think this project really makes a connection to the past, present, and future. And this is so special, that this project somehow captured beautiful memories of people that might not be with us for a very long while anymore.

ACT Which were the important lessons learned within your project?

VIVIAN For me the project was like a bubble of safety and support in order to navigate uncertainty. During the coronavirus pandemic—especially the first bit when we didn't know what was happening to our professional lives, to our private lives, to everything. On the one hand, it was very tiring to connect on Zoom, but on the other hand, what the Actors Program taught us was how to navigate uncertainty. It was supposed to be about project management and how to act with your community, but it also showed me how to navigate this uncertainty in my personal life. It actually felt a bit like psychotherapy. So this was the important learning that I gained from it.

ALEXIA What can I say after that?! (laughing) Vivian is our inspirational leader! And Manos is our energy and resilience leader. We call him Super-Manos.

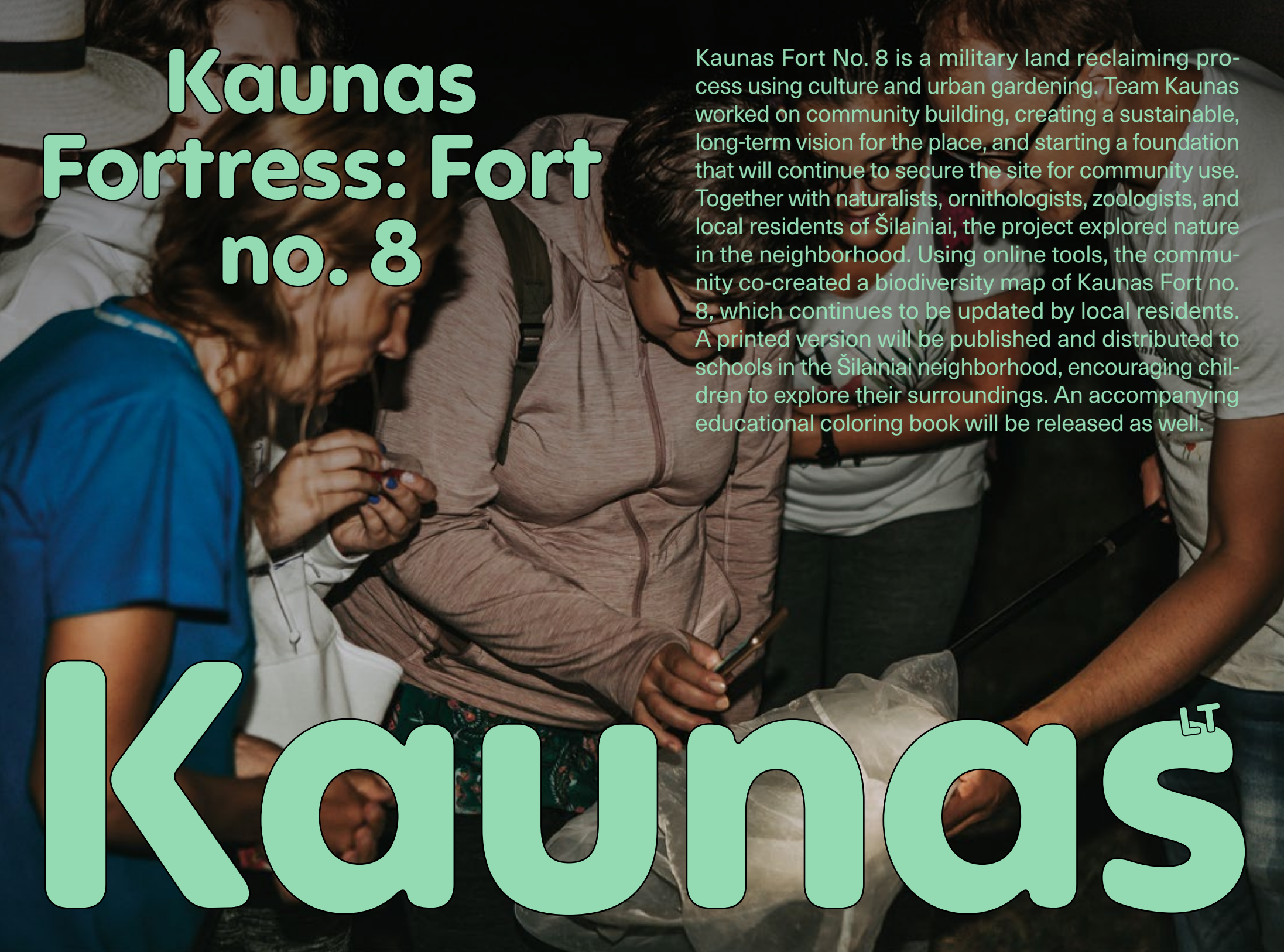VIVIAN And Alexia takes care of our wellbeing. She is our wellbeing manager.

Nonprofit sector
ALEXIA SPYRIDONIDOU
SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY EXPERT

Private sector
VIVIAN DOUMPA STIPO

Public sector
MANOS KITSELIS
KAISARIANI MUNICIPALITY

Team Kaisariani/Athens

Kaunas Fortress: Fort no. 8

Kaunas Fort No. 8 is a military land reclaiming process using culture and urban gardening. Team Kaunas worked on community building, creating a sustainable, long-term vision for the place, and starting a foundation that will continue to secure the site for community use. Together with naturalists, ornithologists, zoologists, and local residents of Šilainiai, the project explored nature in the neighborhood. Using online tools, the community co-created a biodiversity map of Kaunas Fort no. 8, which continues to be updated by local residents. A printed version will be published and distributed to schools in the Šilainiai neighborhood, encouraging children to explore their surroundings. An accompanying educational coloring book will be released as well.

Kaunas LT

ACT   Can you tell a little about the place of your project?

EVELINA   So our project is set in the city of Kaunas in Lithuania in a first World War heritage site which is called Fort No. 8. It is surrounded by this huge neighborhood called Šilainiai with multi-story buildings. All three of us grew up here.

The Fort is about 10 ha. of land and has underground tunnels, half of which are flooded. There is an urban garden on site which covers a part of what used to be a shooting area in former times. This garden is actually really important for locals to grow food, to meet, to relax and be in nature. The neighborhood does not have that many green spaces. It is a very dense area and we don't have that many parks. More than 50,000 people live here, so these spaces are really important.

In 2009, we started to change the space. It slowly became more vibrant—a place for community culture, events, international projects, and heritage communities coming together and starting to look after the place. They want to know how to bring all of these ideas and caring for this place together into one: to encourage all of these groups to communicate and get a common vision. Because we all want to ensure that this place will always be a place for nature, communities and the diverse culture that is around us and is already manifesting in the place.

ACT   What methods or activities did you use to come closer to your goal?

EVELINA   There were three steps. First, we did a biodiversity map. This is something that had never been done here before. We invited naturalists, zoologists, and local residents to learn about the place. Then, we created a document where all of the data that we had collected is put together and contextualized. This document is called "Fort No. 8 Stories." This project is led by Agne. So here

we are aiming to put all the information, data, history, and communities in context because there are so many layers to it, and we keep learning about new layers as we go along with it. This opened up new ways of thinking about the area; the more we learn about it, the more we discover. So this is actually a long and complex project that we started in 2016 and will continue for much longer. The last step is trying to formalize our work. Because to continue our work, it is also necessary to set it into a form, to have formal agreements, and so on.

ACT   In which parts of the project did you involve citizen participation?

EVELINA   There were a lot of things happening that were open for all people. One of the events was super beautiful. People were exploring and learning about the environment for maybe the first time. My goal was to look at what we have and also somehow to encourage people to care about this place a little bit more, because it became a bit of a dump—a place for local residents to come and throw their waste.

So how do you switch that around and actually explore in a fun and engaging way, together with experts, and touching it and smelling it on the ground right there? And then you see it maybe for the first time, and then experience it. It was a really amazing experience—we had a great time and we learned so much. We used an app because everybody has a smartphone. So you take a photo and upload it on the app, and it goes directly live into our map which is online, so you can contribute.

When spring came, I realized that people started to care. They did not want bushes to be cut down because they realized there were birds living in them. So the simple magic of these invisible things suddenly becomes visible, and then you behave differently in the space.

Team Kaunas

So participation was special, on the one hand, for contributing to the data and scientific work of the map, and, on the other hand, for changing the value of the place.

ACT   Which was the most surprising moment within your project?

EVELINA   One was when we had found this one corner in the park which was very polluted: lots of trash, old engines that released toxins, toilet sinks—you name it!

The Kaunas Fortress Park organization had started clearing the space to make it accessible, so we were walking around there and I was close to losing hope in humanity at that point. I took out my phone and documented what we were seeing on a Facebook Live video, saying that we did not know what to do now, that it might not be possible to do events at the Fort anymore.

Then some people contacted me, a rave community in Kaunas: young people who organize rave parties in the

forest. They gathered under the hashtag #Raversdonottrash and organized days of collecting litter. They organized cars and music. This was a very special moment for me, to see that, by putting the message out there into the world, you find out that people care and want to take action. And we also discovered another community that is using the Fort area we had not known about.

Nonprofit sector
EVELINA ŠIMKUTĖ
NGO "PENKI, KETURI PLIUS"

Private sector
AGNE DAILIDAITE
MB "BAU PROJEKTAS"

Public sector
EGIDIJUS BAGDONAS
KAUNAS FORTRESS PARK

Art-Sport Network

Territories

Saint-Denis.FR

A participatory process to co-create hybrid artistic and sports forms that connect, empower, and activate the local community in the run-up to the Paris Olympic Games in 2024, using the Games as a lever for social, cultural, and territorial transformation.

Team Saint-Denis

Team Saint-Denis developed the art-sport network and practices to raise questions, highlight, and tackle social and political issues: the appropriation of public space, the place of young people within it, the relationship to the body, gender and minorities, competition, and local practices. Through performances and games in public spaces, the art-sport approach explores the "right to the city"—the city as a common good accessible to all.

ACT Why did you decide to work at the intersection of arts and sports? What is art-sport to you?

AGNES For us, it's the opportunity to create encounters between people working in the sports field and people from the artistic or cultural world. We see it as a surprise, an opportunity to open the minds and to make space for something new. From the perspective of the public sector, this may be a very useful tool to implement new public policies. We have been working on this network of art-sport for three or four years, and we are already seeing results in the field of social inclusion, for example.

ALEXANDRA In France, art and sport are very far apart. Even the ministries in charge of culture and sport have split up at a point, and there is a lot of mistrust from both sides. Speaking from the side of the audience: the sports public does not mix with the public of arts. And this is sad, because we could learn a lot in terms of how a public constitutes itself going from the art field to the sports field and vice-versa. Also in terms of organization. In France, arts and culture are either very public or very private. On the one hand, there are a lot of commissions and subsidies, and on the other hand there is the market. In sports, there are a lot of non-professional and self-organized forms, escaping this public/private dualism. So this kind of crossover is a way to learn in terms of formation of a public and forms of organization.

And finally, a term that is very important for us and makes the triangle complete: the public space, or what we call it in French: the territory. Here it is about going away from the equipment and getting more flexible while mixing art and sport in public spaces.

ACT Your original plan was to create a "territoire laboratoire" for local art sport experimentations. How did you have to adapt this plan along the way?

ALEXANDRA Our first adaptation was to reevaluate what we were actually aiming for. We came to the conclusion that it actually is more about interaction in a very translocal and dynamic way, because we believe in local experimentation connected to other localities.

ACT How did you overcome the difficulties you faced as a team?

ALEXANDRA The strength of our team lies in the fact that we kept talking a lot, and we always trusted each other. We kept finding opportunities, taking advantage of each new context or project we had. In this way, our project evolved with the connection with our European partners, bringing the submission of an Erasmus+ bid, but also with the creation of new art sport tools, and finally a new common project bringing our three structures together on the question of disability and inclusion through the frame of art, sport, public space.

ACT You mentioned innovations within the art-sport field that you came up with. Can you tell us a little more?

AGNES I think the most important result was that the two fields learned from one another, questioning themselves and opening up for cooperation. Because, in the end we can only develop and transform together. I experienced that within the County Council as well. When the departments started to get into conversation with each other, it was uncomfortable in the beginning—it was difficult for everybody to change the way they were working. But in the end, we all gained a lot.

It's like a revolution. It might sound exaggerated, but it is the reality. We tend to be very closed: compartmentalized, siloed, partitioned. Everyone has a way to work, skills, goals, and a working culture. It is about opening up to change and working together.

ACT Can you present one of the tools you created?

ALEXANDRA We created a tool called Urbex/Multiplex. We tried to combine public spaces with digital tools, and this gave birth to a new way of urban exploration in specific local contexts and public spaces. In Urbex, people usually use a cellphone to film while exploring unknown, abandoned places, and then share the videos on Youtube. So what we did was ask young people to film themselves in public spaces to understand how they use them, and we asked them how they would actually like those places to be, how they would transform them. Through zoom, we then connected several local places, which we called Multiplex. This makes it a tool for documentation as well as speculation, and helps us to think about possible future uses of our public spaces.

Nonprofit sector
NIL DINÇ GONGLE
HENRIETTE MORRISON GONGLE

Private sector
ALEXANDRA COHEN CUESTA

Public sector
AGNÈS MULLER
COUNTY COUNCIL OF SEINE-SAINT-DENIS, DEPARTMENT OF SPORTS AND LEISURE

About 30 years ago, a TU-134 passenger aircraft was placed at the banks of the Danube River near the mid-sized Bulgarian town of Silistra, located in the north-eastern part of the country next to the Romanian border. In the 1990s, the aircraft functioned as a children's educational space for aerospace and informatics. During this period, the aircraft had become one of the modern symbols of Silistra. However, as the town experienced an economic decline at the beginning of the century, the structure lost its function as an educational space and has been abandoned since.

Responding to a demographic crisis in which young people continue to leave the city in large numbers, team Silistra set out to renovate the airplane as a social and technical hub for innovative educational and community-building activities. The project rehabilitated both the internal infrastructure as well as involved local citizens in the work of maintaining the area around the airplane, improving the facilities for leisure, and organizing workshops on themes such as art, ecology, and design.
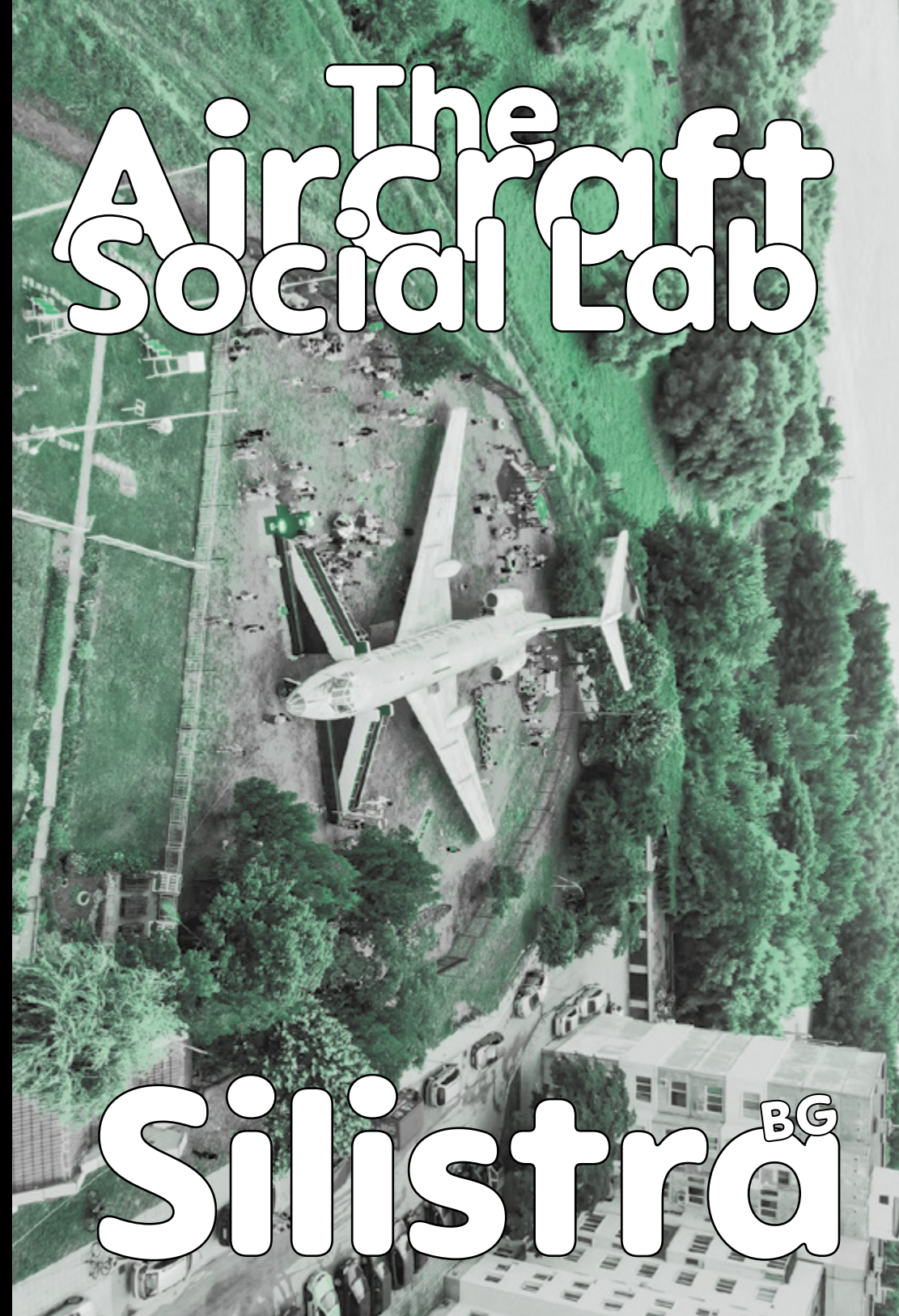
The Aircraft Social Lab

Silistra BG

ACT You mentioned one thing you value most during the ACT program.

TODOR Connecting to other change-makers. To me, this was key because of three things: inspiration, empathy—because we all deal with similar things and have similar problems—and hope.

ACT What was an important lesson learned with your project?

TODOR Building trust. We realized once again that within our context here, in Bulgaria, the trust issue could actually be a problem. To really get residents to participate in our project we first have to show them that we really aim at delivering a positive change. Often, there is a lot of talking about particular projects and promoting change in our society, then people get excited about it and in the end things get postponed, canceled, or just never happen, which has led to mistrust. So we focused, first of all, on setting up a good process structure. In our case, this meant renovating the aircraft and getting our "hardware" ready before other serious civil engagements. We were open to the public about our development plans and even involved them in some idea-development events. People saw that and appreciated it, so we were able to set a good base to start with engaging them and creating events together—to bring life back into this aircraft that has such a special meaning to all of us living in Silistra.

ACT Is there one specific moment that you remember that was special for you during the ACT program?

MIGLENA For me, the aircraft is a memory of my childhood. It used to be a very important object back then, and I spent a lot of time there. I could always see it from my mom's balcony, so it is very exciting for me to bring it back to life. I remember when we were sharing our ideas with the other ACT participants. Seeing how others reacted to our idea and getting their approval within the group was very empowering to me.

TODOR It was very exciting to connect to so many creative people from all around Europe that are doing really cool stuff in their places. We felt great realizing that other people within the field of urban change actually value our project. We knew about the potential of the project, but sharing this with others and seeing their response—everybody being super excited about it—really gave us a lot of positive feelings.

Nonprofit sector
TODOR KESAROVSKI
NGO DUROSTORUM DRUSTAR SILISTRA

Private sector
MIGLENA ILIEVA
CENTRE OF ART AND MUSIC "MEGATON"

Public sector
PLAMENA STOYANOVA
MUNICIPALITY OF SILISTRA

Team Silistra

Youth Lab UK
Wolverhampton

Young people are often ostracized and underrepresented when it comes to redesigning their hometowns. Team Wolverhampton's work with young people in their city shows that they have creative ideas and ambition. The team used a combination of youth engagement, research, and arts and creativity to promote young people's ideas and amplify their collective voice to foster more youthful attributes in the city: inventive, dynamic, and playful high streets.

ACT   What activities did you do to approach young people and involve them in the process of changing the highstreets of Wolverhampton?

ALICE   My team and I have already worked with young people in the area for quite a while, so we already have an established structure that works with our vulnerable groups like children in care and care leavers. Also, we are working with schools and doing assemblies. Each school in Wolverhampton has two seats in the youth council, and we are working with them on how to elect those young people that they would like to see as part of that.

As part of that process, we work in four key areas in Wolverhampton, where we have quite high levels of deprivation as well as quite a lot of issues with mental health and substance misuse. There was a need to focus on those areas and get their young people involved as a way of building those resilience skills.

And so the way in which we engaged with our young people was by using existing relationships that we already had with local schools and local communities. This made it possible for us to do all of our work, since we went into a national lockdown pretty much as we came off the plane from Berlin, so this meant we could not establish new structures and groups.

ACT   What's special about your approach to involve young people?

ALICE   I think to a certain extent, young people really are desperate to become decision-makers. It's our job as adults and professionals to give them the tools to be able to do that. It's not just about how they can support the civic community and how we can move things on from a community perspective, but also from their own, and actually teaching them those decision-making techniques. So, to actually give them resources and teach them how to use them self-reliantly. Those are the skills that we want to teach to young people for becoming functional adults and contributing to their society.

It's also about bringing in experts to speak about what the issues are and making sure they've got the facts and figures. Treating them like adults and making sure that they've got access to all the right information. And then it's about the framework around that. About how do you capture that and then reflect back on what they have said. Sometimes you get lost in translation when you are 45 and work with 16-year-olds.

I think it's really fun for them to be in control of decisions and going on a journey where they do not really know what they are going to end up with.

ACT   How were you interacting with these young people during the process when you could not meet in person?

ALICE   We used email, WhatsApp, not so much Facebook. We've been broadcasting quite a lot through the new broadcasting option on WhatsApp. It used to be a bit of a data protection issue when being in a group and sharing each other's phone numbers, but the broadcasting element has really enabled us to spread messages. That's been really helpful.

And just also always turning up. What we have learned talking to colleagues around the country who do similar work was that they sometimes cancel shortly before online meetings when they have not heard back from anybody. But we decided to always keep going. And this consistent approach means they always know we're going to be there for the planned opportunities. They're not waiting for us to hear that it's going ahead. They know it's going to happen. And I think that consistent approach has really been good. Especially in a time of uncertainty in so many other areas of our lives, and also with a lot of the social interactions they are used to having becoming impossible.

Nonprofit sector
LIAM SMYTH
ROSALIND ARGO
CREATIVE BLACK COUNTRY

Private sector
LAURA CAULFIELD
UNIVERSITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON

Public sector
ALICE VICKERS
CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

Team Wolverhampton

Prese

Future

Pre

Past

PART THREE

The Fabric of the Future City
Weaving desirable futures

Urgency to Change

Actors of Urgent Change

Spaces of Urgency

Let's Claim That Space!
**A New Perspective
for the Climate Justice Movement**

The Future of Collaboration

Plural Stories, Plural Actions
Collaborating for Possible Futures

Collaboration & Transformation
A critical Perspective

Systems, Roots and Social Glue
How to foster Networks of Change

Mycelia and Utopia
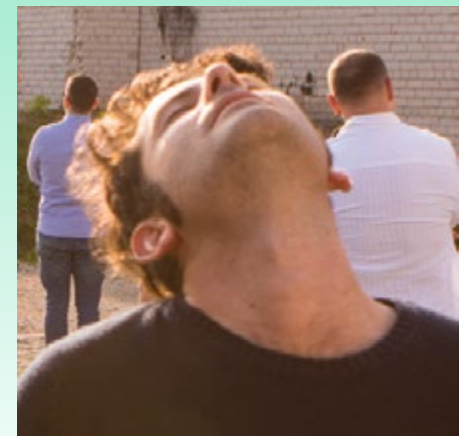**Food as an Experimental
Tool for Hybrid Co-Creation**

Resilient Communities
The Utopia for Dystopian Urban Futures

How can we work together in the Future?

THE FABRIC OF THE FUTURE CITY

Weaving Desirable Futures

by
Elena Artiles
Leyes
Lilith Boettcher
Katrina Günther
from
Future Probes

According to the OECD, we can expect cities to undergo huge changes in the years to come. By 2050, small cities are projected to experience a vast population loss whereas large cities with over 5 million inhabitants are expected to grow.[1] Moreover, climate change, regional economic disparities, social inequalities, and other factors can be expected to drastically change the fabric of future cities.

In the face of radically changing urban landscapes, the question arises of how we, as societies and as citizens, can collectively design our future cities to meet our future needs. How can future cities hold space for everyone? How can a future city manage, represent, and celebrate diversity among its population? How can we live sustainably? And how can we achieve all of this while still ensuring a high quality of life for all?

To answer such pressing questions about the future, we can apply a set of methods and perspectives that we call futuring.[2] Futuring describes thinking systemically about the future while asking: "What might the future look like, and where can we find present-day leverage points to influence its outcome?"

(1)   OECD/European Commission (2020), Cities in the World: A New Perspective on Urbanisation, OECD Urban Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/d0efcbda-en.

(2)   Futuring can have many names and is often referred to as futures studies or even futures thinking.

ABOUT THE FUTURE

When talking about the future, it is important to understand three things: First, the future has not yet happened and is thus still open to transformation. Second, it then follows that there are many possible outcomes of what the future might finally look like. The future is not a single thing but rather a multitude of possibilities. Third, because the future does not yet exist, we can't actually make direct inquiries about it. What we can do, however, is look for images of the future in the present. In other words, we can look at the multitude of futures that are imaginable to us today and we can differentiate which among them seem possible and impossible, probable and improbable, desirable and undesirable.

In the scientific futuring world, the futures deemed possible or even probable have received much more attention than those that might be desirable. And while making use of scientific data and thinking systemically about all possible and probable futures is an important part of futuring, it is crucial that we also ask ourselves what we *want* the future to look like.

COLLECTIVE FUTURING

The question of desirability is an urgent one and requires a multifaceted answer. There is no one desirable future for all. If we ask what a city might look like in the future so that it is great and liveable for all, the answer requires input from not just those currently living in that city but also perhaps even those thinking about moving there in the future.

As parts of a whole, many small interactions and changes can ultimately shape the complex yet adaptive system of a city.
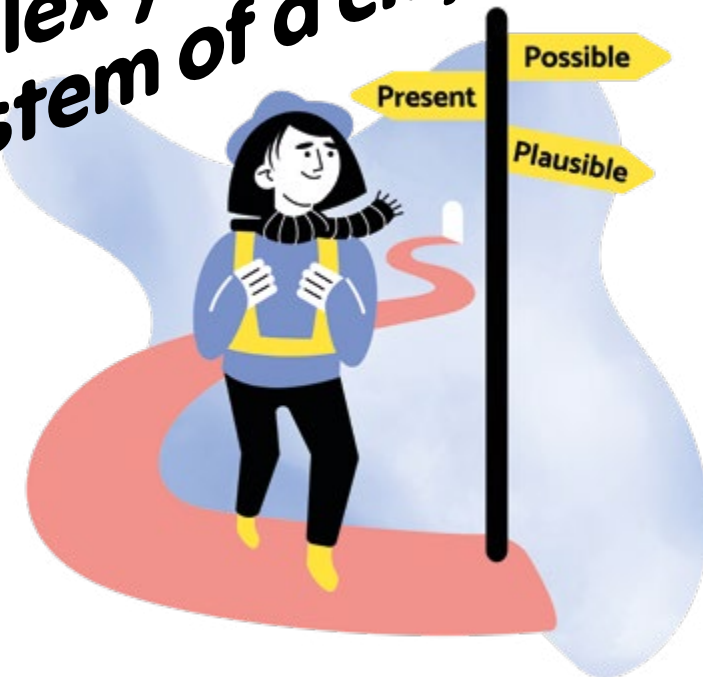
Why? Just as the unique, colorful, and sometimes chaotic fabric of a city is formed by its individual citizens, desirable futures are similarly colorful and diverse in what they represent. People will vary—sometimes radically—from one another when it comes to the question of what we individually want our cities to look and feel like. And it is this variety of voices, perspectives, and desires that turn futuring into a rather messy process (but also a fun and creative one).

Even the most thoroughly pre-planned cities and futures rarely take shape according to plan. Neither cities nor futures follow a linear strategic plan of how things should unfold. And that's a good thing because, instead, cities and futures can grow and develop organically, in constant negotiation with its citizens and shapers. Collective futuring leads to creative ideas, radical changes, and to more openness towards transformative processes. Empowering individuals—especially those who are often marginalized or discriminated against—to have the time, space, and platform to take part in this negotiation process is the key to finding leverage points for future transformations as well as better, more liveable future cities for all.

There are a variety of approaches and methods within futures studies that can also be applied in the context of urban development for collective futuring. A well-studied approach, for example, is the *Zukunftswerkstatt* (future workshop),[3] in which a group of diverse participants collectively create a future urban utopia and, in the process, derive concrete steps for getting there. Scenario development approaches like the Manoa method[4] are also valuable. Here, another diverse group uses their collective experience and knowledge to examine a complex system (such as a large city) for potential factors that might influence the future. The participants ultimately use their combined imagination to describe and evaluate different possible futures. More recently, playful formats have emerged that try to emphasize the fun in futuring, such as card games that focus on imagination. Two recent examples are *The Thing from the Future*[5] and the *Instant Archetypes* toolkit.[6]
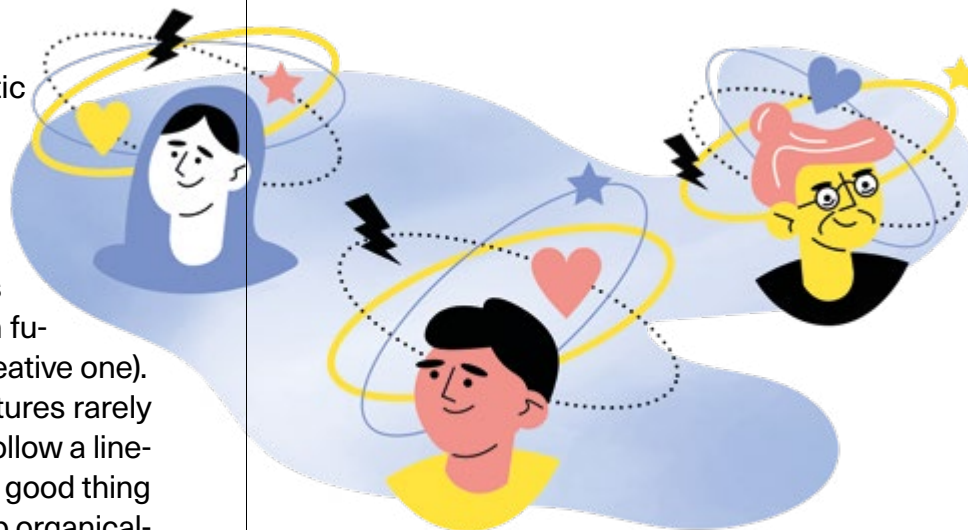
MAKING DESIRABLE FUTURES VISIBLE: FUTURES PROBES

We are members of a collective of four female futurists called Futures Probes and we have found our own approach to support collective futuring.

At Futures Probes, we collect samples of desirable futures on specific (and regularly changing) topics via a futures questionnaire. We illustrate and publish these futures online to make them visible to the public for two reasons: first, every single person can and should be given a voice in how they imagine a specific desirable future, and second, the range of desirable futures can vary greatly, and that diversity should be made visible when negotiating futures.

(3) (5) *The Thing from the Future* was developed by the Situation Lab (Stuart Candy) in 2014.

(4) (6) *Instant Archetypes: A Toolkit to Imagine Plural Futures* was developed by Superflux in 2018.

Additionally, we use social media and other platforms to talk about the importance of collective futuring. We write about complexity, uncertainties, systems thinking, utopias and dystopias, futuring methods, and the urgent questions we all might ask ourselves when it comes to imagining and shaping the future. We use our own futurist lens to analyze the topic at hand (most recently: the futures of tourism) and to showcase not only the many problems and challenges embedded within each topic but also the multitude of creative approaches and ideas regarding future change that have already been implemented. We do this work because there is one thing that we as futurists know above all else: collectively imagining desirable futures is incredibly important but also really, *really* hard to do. And it requires a lot of practice and self-reflexion.

The starting point for Futures Probes came when COVID-19 brought a somewhat unexpected halt to the world as we knew it, changing—or at least challenging—prevailing models of our relationships, consumption habits, and work routines. People all around the world started questioning and reevaluating previously taken-for-granted social constructs and ways of doing things. Many started asking: what short-term changes can we implement to make life more bearable? What can, and should, post-pandemic life look like? We wanted to use this particular moment as an opportunity to ask people about their future   desires, hopes, and fears. We believed that the many   changes in people's personal and professional lives brought about by COVID-19 would most likely lead to a heightened sensitivity towards future uncertainties and the consequences of large-scale social change. We were especially interested in hearing from women, since their voices often go unheard when it comes to
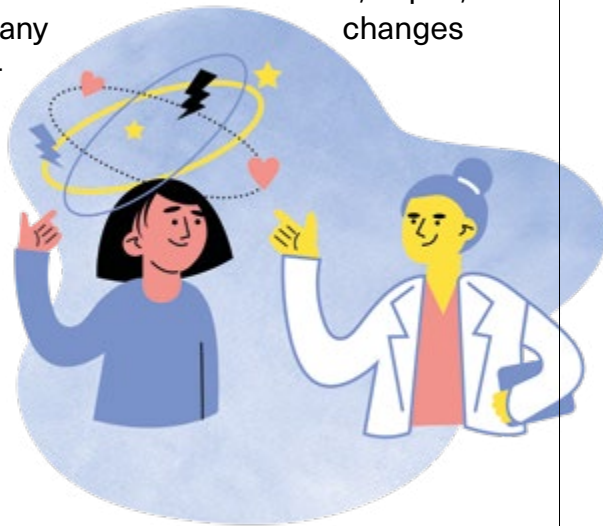
Collective futuring leads to creative ideas, radical changes, and to more openness towards transformative processes.

imagining challenges, desires, and hopes for the future. We asked female-identifying people in their 30s living in Berlin to give us some insights into their desirable futures and the current challenges they were facing.

Our questions revolved around current challenges, relationships, new work routines, and—most importantly—wishes and hopes for a post-pandemic future in an imagined 2040. The various future aspirations and creative ideas that emerged subsequently formed the basis for two narrative post-COVID-19 future scenarios that incorporated all the different wishes and desires imagined by the women who participated in our questionnaire. These two desirable futures were mirrored back to the participants, opening up a dialogue and showcasing how collective futuring can lead to broader future visions for a better life for all. They also showcased the difficulty in merging different desires and that imagining a better future for all, by all, is a dynamic and never-ending process. Futuring is an ever-ongoing conversation and negotiation among all participating voices and future shapers.

WHAT CAN WE DO AS INDIVIDUALS?

EMBRACE COMPLEXITY

Cities consist of many different units, like humans, bikes, cars, and pigeons (just to name a few), whose behaviors depend on each other. As components of larger structures or networks, humans, pigeons, and bikes constantly interact and adapt. It's these units, these many parts of a whole, that make a city complex and adaptive. People can alter their behavior and cars, bikes, and pigeons can be

made to alter theirs as well. Infrastructure can also be altered and rebuilt, ultimately leading to a larger systemic change and to an entirely different, adapted future city. Rather than getting overwhelmed by the sheer complexity of cities and their futures, we can embrace that complexity as the accumulation of potential for change, a potential that we can all influence.

THINK BIG, ACT SMALL

As parts of a whole, many small interactions and changes can ultimately shape the complex yet adaptive system of a city. We can construct our desirable future city step by step, without the necessity to implement one all-encompassing solution. Instead, our actions as citizens can be multiplied by others and collectively serve as leverage points for change. While utopian visions are valuable, we should not get discouraged by the seemingly impossible transformation at hand. Every step taken towards it, be it ever so small, has the potential to multiply, inspire, and shape our utopias.

PRACTICE FUTURING

We often take things for granted and don't question their status quo. Understanding that most things do not have to stay the same and that thoughts, behaviors, rituals, and norms can change—and have done so frequently in the past—is the first step towards thinking in plural futures. Only then, do we really start to see new possibilities arise. Thinking in plural futures is not something we practice daily and it can feel odd to rethink the future. Indeed, when we just begin to explore the realm of desirable futures, we can feel overwhelmed, or that our ideas are perhaps too radical or too "out there." Exploring these possibilities and desires, however, is a necessary first step in shaping cities the way we want them to be. And the good news is, once we start practicing the art of futuring, it gets easier with time!

DIVERSIFY THE FUTURE

Cities consist of many different people and groups who bear an entire spectrum of desires, needs, and wishes. Instead of insisting on one ideal and "one size fits all" approaches, the inclusion of different desirable futures can reinforce and strengthen a city's adaptive ability. It is therefore most useful, and even necessary, to actively look for diversity when exploring and collecting desirable futures. We can simply start with asking others, especially those who are not in our own respective bubbles, about their desirable futures, and then listen with open ears and an open mind.

Urgency to Change

ACTORS OF URGENT CHANGE

BY MATTHIAS EINHOFF*

Why changing public institutions to become more agile and inclusive will help to create more equality, quality, and diversity in less time

* Artist, co-director of ZK/U (Center for Arts and Urbanistics), Team Berlin, ACT 2013-15

In 2014, the Center for Arts and Urbanistics (ZK/U) became part of the first generation of Actors of Urban Change (ACT), in collaboration with their local public and private sector partners. The aim was to develop strategies and methods that would bridge the global discourses happening at ZK/U with the local practices in the district. The ACT program created a framework that would build collaboration between the public and cultural sector and create an output that appealed to both a public sector audience and the rooted communities at ZK/U. In doing so, this work would also strengthen mutual understanding and relationships between the two groups.

The program was able to mitigate the effects of gentrification, segregation, and social educational injustices, but new challenges have since entered the arena of urban struggle.

URGENT CHALLENGES

In Berlin, we have seen phases of intensified migration since 2015, with open questions around basic needs and integration. We have also started to experience the impact of climate change, which might only be a hint of more substantial change to come. Meanwhile, the financial crisis drove investors into the real-estate market, driving prices and rents to unprecedented highs. And finally, the global COVID-19 pandemic created even more precarious working conditions for cultural and social workers. It seems like we are far away from the much discussed 'resilient city.'

But why are cities still so slow in answering increasingly urgent questions? The issues to be solved are often complex and take thoughtful, long-term planning in order to achieve sustainable effects. In addition, participatory practices that find the right balance between citizen and expert decision-making are still lacking adequate institutional development.

Over the last few decades, the realities of citizens and how they conceive their social environment has drifted away from how the public administration deals with these realities. This is highly problematic because the foundations of democratically justified institutions are increasingly questioned, making way for privately driven—and thus often more agile—for-profit bodies.

In this regard, the ACT program has been visionary and ahead of its time by creating a framework that would foster cross-sectoral collaboration and tangible outcomes among individual citizens, activists, cultural workers with public administrations, and political representatives. Through ACT, projects that might serve as "good examples" (to avoid speaking of best practices) and a testing ground for scalable, adaptable inclusive urban planning approaches evolved and took a first step towards a better mutual understanding.

But why should we care about trying to change our institutions of city planning? Why should we want to build bridges between

communities and their administerial representatives? Couldn't we just go ahead with what we think is right and create our own parallel social spheres of like-minded individuals and groups?

SIZE MATTERS

What changed since the start of the Actors of Urban Change program is that we now have more certainty about the trouble we are in. Over the last five years, spatial struggles in cities have increased substantially. Rents in Berlin have risen by a staggering 42 percent; a person earning an average income is more likely than ever to be displaced for economic reasons. We are also more certain that climate change will have an unprecedented impact on life on Earth with overwhelming negative effects. It is urgent that we act with determination and on a scale that goes beyond our own social spheres. This is why scale matters. If we want to create the change needed, we need to reach out to the institutions that have, over centuries, grown to a size that can meet the scale of these challenges. And, if necessary, we need to change the mentality within these institutions. It's going to take much more than convincing our friends to use cargo bikes and stop consuming meat in order to sustainably face these challenges.

DEMOCRACY MATTERS

Citizens often forget that administrations are supposed to serve them. The mentality and tone within administrations often create a sense of oppression rather than a sense of service or cooperation. This detachment is partly a result of the conservative nature of administrative institutions compared with the nimble and fast-moving members of Generation Z, who are used to parallel streams of information and agile decision making.

The "contrast of mentalities" has created a sense of frustration on both sides that paves the way for more radical and less democratic attitudes towards decision-making for the public sphere. Whether these are radical market-oriented voices, or the apologists of a "stronger state," they are clearly not in favor of making more space for a diversity of voices striving for the common good.

INCLUSION MATTERS

As a matter of fact, societies are becoming more diversified, with a growing number of social realities, peer groups, and horizontal communities. Within democratic political systems, the diversification of biographies leads to a diversification of demands towards the representing institutions. Within electoral systems that support plurality of the political landscape, this led to an end of hegemony of the traditional political parties and created a more colorful political landscape.

Within the institutions of city-making, however, these effects of diversification have not trickled down yet. These institutions have long-term planning cycles (in housing, infrastructure, etc.) and have

not yet understood the multifaceted nature of their citizens. Nor have they developed the technologies to represent and adopt current needs. For instance, the paradigm of the car-dominated city has still not been abandoned in favor of more sustainable and more in-demand means of mobility, such as bikes and public transport. It is more important than ever to create methods, tools, and channels of communication between citizens and their planning institutions to provide a space of encounter that goes beyond the four-year election cycle.

MODELS MATTER:
HAUS DER STATISTIK

The Haus der Statistik, at one of Berlin's most prominent locations next to the TV tower and Alexanderplatz, has been vacant for more than 10 years. The buildings were originally supposed to be torn down and replaced with private apartments and offices. In 2015, civil society stakeholders who prevented the complex's demolition founded the Haus der Statistik initiative and entered discussions with local politicians to develop alternative proposals and ideas for the 50,000 sqm building complex. Following further negotiations, in-depth feasibility studies, and a change of government in Berlin, Haus der Statistik gained formal community recognition in 2017.

This step paved the way for further the development of Haus der Statistik as an organization oriented towards the common good. Five partners, the so-called Koop5, have been working since to develop the quarter cooperatively and cross-sectorally. The common goal is to create a community-oriented quarter with a differentiated mix of affordable housing, administration, education, social affairs, art, and culture. The cooperative approach among politicians,

Why are cities still so slow in answering increasingly urgent questions?

civil society, the municipality, housing associations, and real-estate administration represents a milestone in urban development and marks a major step towards closer collaboration and true inclusion of civil society within local administrations and politics.

Now that the plans and once unthinkable demands of the initiative have become reality, other municipalities around the world are using the project as a model for similar initiatives. While a new generation of public servants is willing to adopt and adapt the concepts of participatory urbanism into their realities, they are still lacking the juridical and administrative foundations for doing so. This is why a large-scale model project like Haus der Statistik is so important for future city administrators: such a project creates, or rather, demands new tools of governance that might in turn create new regulations. Such innovations can then be copied in other places, multiplying the impact of one large project at even larger scales.

ACTORS OF URGENT CHANGE

Actors of Urban Change is one of the few programs that reaches out to both grassroots organizations and formal administration offices, building desperately needed bridges among these different stakeholders. ACT is thus a pioneer in its field of cross-sectoral collaboration and its underlying philosophy is more relevant than ever. Although the program is coming to an end within its existing framework, it has not lost any of its importance. Though it might be gone for now, ACT may reappear as Actors of *Urgent* Change in the not-too-distant future.

Werkstatt (Workshop) Haus der Statistik, where citizens can learn about and shape the redevelopment process of the building. Photo: Panos Georgiou

Haus der Statistik, 2019. Photo: V. Tomaschko

SPACES OF URGENCY BLIESE BY KINGMA*

Protecting Free Space in the City

* Project developer, Space of Urgency, lead curator, Frei(T)räume Conference

Free, independent cultural spaces are currently under threat in many cities around the world. In our current era of pandemics, system collapse, and climate crisis, protecting these spaces becomes an especially crucial and urgent task. But what can we learn from those spaces and their communities? And how can we implement meaningful practices for guaranteeing more sustainable futures and an equitable transition in these spaces?

WHAT ARE SPACES OF URGENCY?

Spaces of urgency are culturally determined social and political spaces created by and for a community. They arise out of our need to act, connect, mobilize, and protest. And they pioneer new ways of collective liberation from rigid systems based on capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. This is why the actions that emerge in spaces of urgency are so diverse. From ecstatic dancing to self-determined living, from networking to community organization, the actions unfolding in these spaces can be powerful tactics for physically mobilizing under a shared sense of urgency.

Urgency in this sense is usually imposed by conditions external to both the space in question and the minds of its members. Urgency can be triggered by society's marginalizing and stigmatizing of certain communities; by an unsupportive or repressive government and legal system; or when a community space refuses to conform to capitalist profit motives. In each case, a space of urgency can arise as a tool of resistance, a shelter for oppressed communities and social movements, as a political narrative against displacement and inequality, or all of the above.

At this moment, we are seeing countless spaces of urgency arise as the global pandemic exacerbates the plight of community spaces already struggling with funding and resource shortages, politically disabling environments, corporate takeovers, gentrification, commodification, social stigmatization, and marginalization.

SPACE OF URGENCY, THE MOVEMENT

This is why we started the movement behind Space of Urgency: to help increase the visibility and resilience of self-organized cultural spaces and their communities by sharing stories, knowledge, and tools for tangible solidarity in times of crisis. This work is executed by a network of independent cultural communities, collectives, and activists that subscribe to the idea that physical space is essential to the survival of our communities.

Space of Urgency demonstration, Berlin, June 2021. Photo: Helena Majewska

As a unifying movement and network, Space of Urgency calls immediate attention to the precarious position of independent cultural spaces and the ways in which they suffer from privatizing and gentrifying interests in the city. Space of Urgency also advocates for the protective roles that such spaces play in sheltering those communities that aren't sufficiently supported by mainstream institutions.

A PLATFORM FOR SOLIDARITY, VISIBILITY, AND POLICY-MAKING

We envision a future in which the long-term survival of spaces of urgency is protected through local and international solidarity. Our platform seeks to promote this solidarity, strengthen local communities, and influence political agents. Spaces need support and our platform enhances the visibility of both their work and their needs. It tells these spaces' stories, weaving those narratives together with their broader social impacts. This is the first step towards a broader vision in which Space of Urgency will help build political and philanthropic narratives that showcase the critical necessity of the spaces we are fighting to protect.

Through communal projects, we can also stimulate exchange, collaboration, and solidarity among spaces. Space of Urgency is in the midst of forming a transnational alliance with like minded NGOs, political agents, and activists to create a swarm for the protection of spaces of urgency worldwide.

A space of urgency can arise as a tool of resistance, a shelter for oppressed communities... [or] as a political narrative against displacement and inequality

Join us at

spaceofurgency.com

LET'S CLAIM THAT SPACE!

BY CLEO MIEULET* JUDITH PAPE

A New Perspective for the Climate Justice Movement

A collective with a vision for one of Berlin's most famous landmarks—the decommissioned Tempelhof airport—argues that, in order for ambitious climate solutions to find their way into the mainstream, they need space, planning support, skillsharing, and knowledge-building.

Over the last few years, the climate justice movement has been raising awareness of the climate crisis and species extinction all over the world. Even the western world has come to understand its vulnerability to climate change. Recent polls in France show that 75% of people under 25 experience anxiety and fear regarding their own future. In Germany, about 80% of the population believe climate policy is the most important field of action. Nonetheless, the biggest emitting countries still lack consistent shifts in policy.

Is it time for a change of strategy within the climate justice movement? Carola Rackete, a well-known German climate activist recently observed that it is "not through friendly appeals, but through direct action, [that] we are building the necessary political pressure to finally end the destructive inaction." But where are we putting the pressure? What are we demanding? Are we just trying to halt carbon pollution? Maybe it's time to try something new and even more ambitious: let's make fossil lifestyles and economies obsolete as a whole.

As a community, we need schools and skillshares that enable us to change our lives and our economies to become climate neutral and regenerative. And we need real spaces in which to finally get started. Just imagine the climate justice movement applying all the knowledge and skills we have acquired blocking fossil infrastructure in order to claim spaces for actual socio-ecological transitions.

THE NEXT PHASE OF CLIMATE JUSTICE ACTIVISM: TRANSFORMATION CENTERS

The COVID-19 pandemic once more confirmed the need for resilient regional circular economies. Meanwhile, we have been long overdue for an active de-growth strategy that effectively counterbalances the logic of globalized exploitation. And it's not rocket science. Actual solutions in agriculture, mobility, materials, energy, construction, and other fields have existed for a long time now. But in order for these solutions to find their way into the mainstream, they need space, planning support, skillsharing, and knowledge-building. This is where regional transformation centers come in. As spaces for housing all of these activities and more, regional transformation centers can become essential infrastructure for enabling the social ecological transition we so urgently need. Through such centers, innovative climate solutions gain recognition, visibility, stable funding, and integration into state administration and policy programmes. As such, we should be establishing these centers in every region!

FROM FOSSIL RUIN TO LIVEABLE FUTURE HUB

Transformation Haus und Feld (Transformation House and Field, or TH&F) is a growing team of about 30 committed people from various backgrounds. Together, we are building a professional network across the different fields of socio-ecological transformation and have co-created a sketch for a new transformation center in the heart of Berlin. Designed to occupy some of the large hangars at the decommissioned Tempelhof airport, the center could provide space for material reuse and upcycling, production of carbon neutral transportation solutions, woodworking studios, foodsharing services, and neighbourhood community assemblies all under one roof. Meanwhile, on the former airfields outside, we are establishing permaculture school gardens and undertaking experiments in soil regeneration.

Our goal is to combine theory and practical knowledge in socio-ecological transformation in one place so that the work not only develops synergistically, but also becomes more accessible and scalable. The sooner the climate justice movement moves on from simply blocking fossil fuel consumption to actively developing solutions, the sooner we will be able to truly face the climate crisis. Doing so requires building networks of transformation centers not just in Germany, but all over the world. Indeed, the UK already has an established network of these centers (climateemergencycentre.co.uk).

Dr. Friederike Habermann, an economist at Netzwerk Ökonomischer Wandel, explains why she views this as a crucial step:

"It is not least the 'political imagination' that is in crisis. It is not enough that a handful of enthusiastic theorists or activists proclaim that another world is possible. The crisis of the political imagination is a social condition defined by the fundamental discrepancy between what is socially and environmentally necessary and what is thought possible. Politics must address this crisis of the political imagination as one of its central challenges. A transformation centre at Tempelhof in this special location is not only an opportunity but can also have a global impact! What other capital city in the world could provide such an infrastructure? The Berlin-Brandenburg region should see this as a huge opportunity."

The sooner the climate justice movement moves on from simply blocking fossil fuel consumption to actively developing solutions, the sooner we will be able to truly face the climate crisis.

Leonie Brandner, Andrea Cetkovic, Julia Hecht, Anke Kirchhoff, Stella Sattler

THINK GLOBAL, TRANSFORM LOCAL: THE CHALLENGES AND CHARMS OF TRANSFORMING BERLIN-BRANDENBURG

Developing a strategy for change in Berlin-Brandenburg is urgent as environmental projections for the region are alarming. Water shortages loom on the horizon and soil quality, already poor to begin with, is degrading rapidly. An obvious opportunity for implementing a more resilient regional circular economy lies in combining the efforts of metropolitan Berlin and predominantly rural Brandenburg. Indeed, the two are already intertwined, with Berlin already relying on Brandenburg for agricultural production, and Brandenburg dependent on Berlin as an economic center. Developing a circular economy for the region must make the most of these existing interconnections. A transformation center can act as a networking, advisory, and educational hub for both experts and laypeople in both the city and the countryside, opening up the possibility for the region to recognize its interdependence and grow together.

CLAIM YOUR RIGHT TO A CLIMATE-JUST CAREER

Once our society begins the ambitious steps towards a socio-ecological transformation, we will very quickly realize that only very few people have the necessary skills to support those changes. Today, there is already a gaping shortage of skilled workers in the field of renewable energy production. Other sectors like agriculture, and the repair, reuse, and up-cycling movement also anticipate huge deficits in skilled labor as we transition to a resource-light and circular regional economy. And some important sectors are yet to identify coming labor changes at all. We lack scientifically based data about the need for competence to achieve our goals in economic sectors relevant to socio-ecological transformation. It would be wonderful if research could provide regions with solid data and pathways for building a resilient, decarbonized economy and labour market. But in order to do so, we need to gather data on the skills we need and those that are available as well as outline major obstacles and opportunities. Drawing such a picture can provide orientation to the changes ahead and enable us as a society to achieve rapid and effective adaptations to our working world.

COOPERATION ACROSS DISCIPLINES

To help tackle the multiple environmental and social crises we face, society as a whole needs to cooperate on building sustainable solutions for a better future. We share the deep conviction that only through enormous flexibility in our socio-cultural fabric is there any chance at all of achieving justice, resilience, and rapid decarbonization. That's why we formed an interdisciplinary alliance of activists, administrators, practitioners, and researchers to design the transformation center at Tempelhof. Together, we created educational and advisory materials and gained a better understanding of the project's practical needs, from physical space and funding to personnel, education, and training.

Risk perception and risk communication are a challenge among all of these actors, however, as is the tension between the pace of administration and policy on the one hand and the rapid approach of climate catastrophe and species extinction on the other. This also suggests that many people have not yet grasped the urgency of our situation.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

TH&F has just completed our proposal for the first development phase of the transformation center. Our plan demands the establishment of the transformation center as a Commons-Public Partnership.This means that a community of "commoners" will negotiate a contract with the local municipal authority. The commoners provide a defined public service (transformative education) and in turn receive the necessary resources and securities from the state. But while we have received a lot of sympathy and attention from the municipality, we unfortunately do not foresee a favourable political environment for the actual execution of our project. As activists, however, we will not be discouraged if administrators and politicians are reluctant to develop the project with us.

Indeed, other examples in Berlin have shown that civic protest can very well lead to civic-public cooperation. Urban planning project Haus der Statistik (also featured in this magazine) famously started with an activist occupation and banner-drop action before ultimately being formalized as a civic-public partnership. Similarly, we will need to draw on the full range of strategies and actions from the climate justice movement for the successful and rapid implementation of a transformation center at Tempelhof.

Examples in Berlin have shown that civic protest can very well lead to civic-public cooperation.

The Future of Collaboration

PLURAL STORIES PLURAL ACTIONS

BY LAURA SOBRAL*

Stories have spread for as long as humans have moved from one place to another. Historical characters both real and fictional have stood out for their extraordinary storytelling ability, from Scheherazade to Marco Polo. The COVID-19 pandemic reminded us of the role of storytelling in human development, both in learning and the creation of social relationships. Storytelling is a powerful tool for drawing attention and encouraging dialogue.

Collaborating for Possible Futures

* Urbanist, co-founder of the The City Needs You Institute and author of the book *Doing it Together—Cooperation Tools for the City co-governance*

Stories are often the essence of things. Keeping them alive is an act of resistance.

STORYTELLING AT THE END OF THE WORLD

The pandemic has limited us in almost everything and reminded us just how essential it is to exchange ideas, to both tell and listen to stories. This reflection on what we lose when we no longer exchange stories brings to mind the wisdom of intellectual and indigenous leader Ailton Krenak. In his book, *Ideas to Postpone the End of the World*, Krenak reveals that one approach indigenous peoples have to delaying the end of the world is by maintaining "our subjectivities, our visions, our poetics about existence." Stories are often the essence of things. Keeping them alive is an act of resistance.

Inspiring stories also have much to do with making things happen. As such stories are passed along, they result in actions. Stories scatter as branches and roots, and the fruits of this metaphorical tree can grow into collective actions. Wonderful stories both inspire and are inspired by people, from the smallest parts of everyday life to the grandest gestures and ideas. Stories have the power to help rethink dysfunctional and discriminatory structures. In a dynamic of mutual learning, stories nourish a growing collective of people, who, inspired by a shared vision, act in collaboration and cooperation.

LISTENING AND TELLING, TOGETHER

Adapting stories and ideas heard from other people and other places, however, requires translation. There is no manual for this, only learning by doing. And this learning often comes with failures,

laughs, and (why not?) some drama. Altogether, this builds teamwork and trust, creating honest relationships that can only emerge out of shared meaningful experiences. Letting ourselves learn from the interaction brings us to an impressive "do-ocracy." Motivation born from inspiration can be so strong that we are more willing to take risks. After all, to be open to failing is to be open to learning.

The world turns on telling stories, listening to stories, and experiencing actions. Each of these steps is equally important as we set out to learn about and change the world that we inhabit.

It is also crucial that we listen carefully to as many stories as possible that come to us from beyond our own experience. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has long warned about the importance of a plurality of stories and voices. What do we know about other people, places, and actions? How do we create the image we have of other people? Our knowledge is built on the stories we hear, and the greater diversity of narratives, the broader our understanding. This act of listening becomes central to building bridges among cultures with different wisdoms. Besides offering diverse perspectives of the past and present, this multiplicity of stories suggests many possible futures. For these stories do not flow in just one direction; the speaker is also the listener, creating a space-time field of insight, self-knowledge, and recognition.

Stories told by many different people, from different situations, and in different contexts can generate a convergence of multiple ideas and actions. In this way, it becomes possible to understand different points of view and discuss various approaches. To leave our own bubbles and learn from each other seems like a potential way of responding to the challenges that we are currently facing. As human beings living together, shaped by diverse perspectives, we can build strong alliances to achieve lasting change.

STORYTELLING FOR POSSIBLE FUTURES

The challenges we face today are many. Living in a society is inherently full of dispute and negotiation, whether over ideas, collective choices, the search for justice, or the nature of harmonious balance. These and other challenges arise everywhere from the scale of the neighbourhood all the way up to the globe. Furthermore, if we understand ourselves as part of the environment, these issues expand to encompass the relationship of humanity to all other living beings.

We are also experiencing a paradigm shift that may someday be compared with the discovery that the Earth was not the centre of the Universe. An era in which we humans believed ourselves at the centre of everything has come to an end. We are increasingly realizing that the predatory relationship we have held towards the other beings that share our planet is not sustainable.

We are in an urgent need to define what "development" is. If there were any still in doubt, the September 2021 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) confirms that we have to change the way in which we relate, not just among ourselves but also with the world and our idea of the future. What we previously believed was development has to be redefined. Humanity needs to aim for something other than limitless consumption and growth.

The IPCC document says "it is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, oceans, and land," but it also says that a catastrophe can be avoided if society changes direction (and fast!). The report is another in a long line of wake-up calls about the way we live and its impacts on the planet. There is a consensus that measures must be taken in cooperation among governments and people from all four corners of the world.

Possible futures for a possible world certainly require the art of coexistence and cooperation among different people. To reach

common goals, we must take plural paths. The change that is needed shall not come from above, from below, or from one side alone, but from many sides converging all on a shared aim. For this to happen, we must share stories, negotiate action, and be open to learning together.

THE FUTURES THAT ARE ALREADY UNFOLDING

No change is too small or too big. There are many valid ways of working towards change. Every person can find what suits them best, whether transforming habits, activism, storytelling, local leadership, building public policy, developing transnational networks—all of this and more, perhaps even in combination. We need all of these skills and approaches. The transformation we face demands new ways of living and requires togetherness, conviviality, mutual learning, and solidarity. If we pay attention and have no fear of trying, we might notice that possible futures are already unfolding in several places. And some of them have been neglected for a long, long time.

> *"We are definitely not the same, and it's wonderful to know that each one of us here is different from the other, like constellations. The fact that we can share this space, that we are travelling together does not mean that we are the same; it means exactly that we are able to attract each other through our differences, which should guide our life script."*
>
> Ailton Krenak, in *Ideas to Postpone the End of the World*

(T)hese stories do not flow in just one direction; the speaker is also the listener, creating a space-time field of insight, self-knowledge, and recognition.

COLLABORATION & TRANSFORMATION A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

BY CHARLES LANDRY*

What do team sports have to do with collaborating for better cities? A lot, it turns out, argues Charles Landry. A plaidoyer for better understanding and exploring the landscape of collaboration.

Like many of you over the last year, I have been playing with Miro and Mural boards. Typically, the task asked of us involves finding agreement on big issues that matter, such as the green transition, gentrification, creating children-friendly cities, inequality, and so on.

When it comes to what's next, there is the mantra: "we need to collaborate." We tend to treat collaboration as an indisputable good and rarely examine its complexities. As such, it's easy to be disappointed when it doesn't yield the results we hoped for.

WHY COLLABORATE?

Dramatically improving cities requires harnessing our collective intelligence and potential, since most problems are multifaceted. Being out of a job, for example, has not only a financial impact, but also social and mental health dimensions. Unemployment is thus best tackled from a 360° perspective in which the public, civic, and private worlds may all have solutions to offer. That implies working together—collaborating.

Changemakers like Actors of Urban Change (ACT) want to facilitate transformation in our cities and are focused on getting the main sectors in a city to work together. Collaboration in this case is a vehicle for achieving transformation more effectively. ACT understands that, by getting all interests and parties around the table, you have a better chance at success. So far, so good. Let's agree, at a very general level, that collaboration is good in principle. Collaboration takes many forms, however, each with its own context, goals, opportunities, and challenges. To continue with our example from ACT, in practice, we see that it's mostly civil society that shows up, and getting both the public and private sector on board tends to be difficult. So why is it that collaboration here becomes so challenging?

SPORTS LESSONS

Sports offer us a diverse set of examples for better understanding and exploring the landscape of collaboration. In a rowing eight, the crew needs to be completely aligned and stroke in unison. If one person is missing, it all falls apart. In football, patterns are rehearsed and each team member has a specific role: defender, attacker, or midfield. While relay races are in part about individuals, the handoffs are crucial moments of teamwork. Cycling, as in the Tour de France, involves still another kind of teamwork in which each leader is supported by domestiques who ride solely for their leader's benefit, rather than trying to win the race on their own. And in synchronized team swimming, where people are largely under water, astonishing feats of teamwork unfold with hardly any visibility.

In team sports, a group of individuals is transformed into a team for the greater good of winning a match. Here, balancing individual self-interest with group interest is ever-present; great sports leave room for individual expression while supporting the cohesion of the whole team. Team members at times may need to constrain themselves in the interests of the greater good, but they also have the benefit of their teammates' support when things are not going so well. Cooperation and competition exist side by side.[1]

Of course, these examples say little about whether the people involved like each other. Human frailties and power dynamics exist everywhere, but perhaps that doesn't matter when it comes to teamwork. Sportspeople have learned that it is all about the collective effort and the common goal. This is reflected in their public statements: when it comes to disagreement, well, what is private remains private.

(1) www.firstpost.com/sports/bradman-oration-mike-brearley-on-what-is-the-point-of-sport-1192317.html

Sports also generally has the elements we often associate with collaboration, such as co-creating, co-designing, co-researching, and co-analysing. You can't achieve goals without these features, although sportspeople may not use those words. Typically, the group comes together, discusses what went right or wrong and makes adjustments. Everyone gives their input and although most sport teams have captains, trainers, and advisors, if these leaders are too bossy, little succeeds.

IN COLLABORATION WE TRUST

Thinking of collaboration in terms of sports provides a rich terrain for thought. It reminds us that collaboration is multifaceted and manifests in many forms. In some cases, collaboration is more open and participatory, while in others, it appears more top-down. What is key is harnessing the group's collective intelligence, commitment, will, and motivation. This is especially true when the goal is systemic transformation. Most crucial is the need to develop trust, and that takes time and practice. Here, you have to communicate honestly, be consistent and reliable, help others without self-promoting, be clear about what you are committing to, and admit your mistakes. There are many mechanisms for creating a safe space in which individuals can warm up to team formation and collaborating.

We tend to treat collaboration as an indisputable good and rarely examine its complexities.

FUTURE OF COLLABORAT

COLLABORATING FROM EXPERIENCE

I have been involved in many collaborative efforts over the years. Some were bad and ineffective, others were middling, and some really successful. This range of outcomes shaped my thinking and reminded me that teamwork is not always straightforward.

The worst example of collaboration I experienced comes from the late 1970s. I worked with a group to set up a publication distribution co-op. Together we helped make new publications related to feminism, the environment, politics, and other alternative social visions available across Britain, Europe, and even the US and Australia. It had an impact. We were a workers' co-op , however, which meant everything was based on joint decision making. This involved Monday meetings which sometimes lasted 4 or 5 hours. This was partly because choosing which publications to distribute was time-consuming, but—typical for the time—these meetings also involved lots of ideological debate and soul searching. People were exhausted by Monday afternoon, but at the same time, the clock was ticking and masses of parcels needed to be packed. Our profit margins were incredibly tight so, perhaps unsurprisingly, the initiative went bankrupt. I co-authored a book about this experience, *What a Way to Run a Railroad: An Analysis of Radical Failure*.[2]

My middling experiences came from a network I was involved in about cities. We brought many interesting people together from different disciplines and discussed how cities could become more resilient, fair, and sustainable. The only problem was that most of the people involved had hardly any experience of how cities actually worked, how policy was made, or how the relationship between

(2) https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2490713. What_a_Way_to_Run_a_Railroad

politicians and public administrators was shaped. There was too little expertise at hand. So, the results were too clichéd and vague: "be more participatory" or "collaborate more." We would have been more successful had the participants been given the opportunity to prepare more. Then, the conversations could have gotten deeper into the problems at hand and produced more incisive recommendations.

My best experiences of collaboration came when there were very precise tasks for the team, such as co-writing books. This has been enriching. One book was about the digitized city. We formed a team that collectively knew much more than I did and my teammates were happy to provide input without too much responsibility for publication. I was delegated to pull everything together. Here we see a combination of teamwork with one individual taking charge. Another two books were about psychology and the city and the creative bureaucracy. We co-authors explored new terrain and each member of the writing team had something completely different to offer. We could only achieve results by involving a wider community through joint exploration and in the end were willing to pull everything together.

CAN LEADERS COLLABORATE?

This raises the question of leadership, especially since leading has begun to get a bad name. Typically, collaborations employ a facilitator or enabler. Although this can work, in reality the facilitator is simply a leader in disguise. The best facilitators truly enable, but that is not always the case.

We know too that "natural" leaders can emerge in any group since they may be able to express themselves better, help the group

What is key is harnessing the group's collective intelligence, commitment, will, and motivation. This is especially true when the goal is systemic transformation.

get focused on goals, or have credibility from experience. The central question is how such leaders behave. If they lose their ego and are humble, then there is potential. If they don't, there will be little progress as they fail to listen to teammates or make room for unheard voices. Then old, disempowering patterns might emerge at the expense of collective insight. This demotivates. Team members lose interest in the collective effort, potential is lost, and possible impact reduced. So emotional intelligence and empathy are key. In fact, the simplest route to successful collaboration is letting go of ego.

Good collaboration implies working together on the basis of mutual respect. It involves giving up power in exchange for creative influence over a bigger challenge or solution. Yet we always need to be aware that some parties simply will not want to collaborate because it may threaten their vested interest or require giving away power.

FROM CRISIS TO OPPORTUNITY

A final point: what are the major transformation triggers where collaboration is vital? Crisis can be a major catalyst. It can generate urgency and can be confusing as there are no obvious answers. Crisis can force you to think afresh and to question settled assumptions. Here, we have to be open to all perspectives. The COVID-19 pandemic is an obvious example, but a crisis could equally come in the form of climate disaster or rising inequality. Crises sharpen the mind and demand that people face up to the situation they are in. Upheaval creates rallying points around which people can collectively gather and organize, whether in pursuit of sustainability, resiliency, or fostering co-creation. Crisis then becomes an opportunity for implementing a collective mission.

So, yes to collaboration, but it is also productive to be self-critical to ensure collaboration succeeds.

SYSTEMS, ROOTS & SOCIAL GLUE

BY DRIFT*

How to Foster Networks of Change

Translocal change networks do not let geographical separation stand in the way of empowerment, social learning, and diffusion. But what are the conditions under which these networks can thrive?

*

At DRIFT, we often see networks from a translocal perspective: transformative initiatives or actors are locally rooted but globally connected. These networks are important for fostering transformative change because of both their ability to replicate innovations in multiple contexts and their commitment to empowering their members.

But how can we foster networks of change in these challenging times? Based on insights gathered from our workshop with Actors of Urban Change on the topic, we found at least four conditions that can help translocal networks to thrive.

BALANCE

Translocal action is a balancing act between working at the hands-on local level and engaging with the more abstract, global scale. Ricardo Silva, of Extinction Rebellion and Ecolise, observes that "it is a constant challenge to find the sweet spot between these." On the one hand, people want to work locally, feel rooted, and focus on getting concrete work done. But too often this can make you feel isolated and disconnected from other organizations and movements. On the other hand, working at the more abstract, global level gives people a sense of being part of a bigger movement of shared struggles in pursuit of a larger goal. But this can also leave change-makers feeling uprooted and disconnected from immediate, tangible outcomes.

For a translocal network to thrive, then, its members must find balance between the practical and the systemic, and this requires hard work. Members need to show up, be active, connect, and cooperate. The work becomes as much about creating a shared narrative and building trust as it is about taking action. This involves everything from sharing knowledge and other resources to selecting the right intermediaries who can amplify the right people in the network and identify what resources need to be shared. To quote Ricardo Silva again: "To support the networks, you have to serve them."

(IN)FORMAL SPACES

Another condition for thriving translocal networks is (in)formality: genuine connections within a network emerge through both formal and informal interactions, suggests Manel Herredero at Ouishare. Moreover, such interactions need multiple kinds of safe spaces in which they can unfold. Sometimes these are spaces where members can share failures; sometimes they are spaces where people can be challenged.

These safe spaces are essential for members of a network to feel free to challenge both resistance and chaos, phenomena that actors inevitably face when trying to execute change. Indeed, instead of seeing chaos and resistance as undesirable, we should see them as breeding grounds for new perspectives and pathways needed to change established systems, argues Naomi Martin, program manager at Actors of Urban Change. Wherever there's resistance, change must be just around the corner.

OPENNESS

Openness and diversity are important mechanisms for participation in networks. Without openness, there is neither a steady flow of connections nor a consistent exchange of ideas, knowledge, or other resources. Openness is also about opening doors: systems only change when we actively open them up for the network to do its work.

We believe that networks that consist of diverse people are stronger and able to open more doors. Matthias Einhof, an Actors of Urban Change alumnus from ZK/U Berlin, learned to engage with

Networks and meaning often emerge organically out of the connections of their members.

the public sector and navigate bureaucratic rigidities partly thanks to the diversity of his network. By successfully opening that door to the public sector, ZK/U ultimately grew from an organization that was politically active into an organization that was *part of* Berlin politics, thereby changing those politics in the process.

SHARING

Finally, we want to elaborate on a theme that has come up several times already: sharing. People need to feel seen and heard and that they aren't working alone. Sharing knowledge and experiences is crucial for addressing both of those needs. But how do you facilitate sharing? Establishing clear common goals is one approach, as is actively reconnecting members to those goals. Sometimes, however, you can facilitate sharing simply by fostering healthy social connections in the network. Vivian Doumpa of Placemaking Europe and STIPO observes that networks and meaning often emerge organically out of the connections of their members. This social glue not only holds networks together but also serves the needs of different people from different places. Social glue facilitates members in discovering for themselves how they feel connected to shared goals and, more importantly, inspires members of the group to share amongst themselves. And whether finding balance, building (in)formal spaces, or fostering openness, network members can only succeed if they are sharing. Networks thrive from sharing.

MYCELIA & UTOPIA

by Dovile Gaizauskiene & Kristian Benić*

Food as an Experimental Tool for Hybrid Co-Creation

CONNECTING ANALOG AND DIGITAL PRACTICES TO BUILD COMMUNITY AND IMAGINE POSSIBLE FUTURES

CONTEXT

Our ideas for the topic of the future of collaboration stem from the insights and reflections accumulated during one year of intense partnership between our organizations: Performative Design Agency from Vilnius, Lithuania, and Kuraz from Rijeka, Croatia. Both organizations were participants in the Actors of Urban Change program from 2017 to 2019. Kuraz is a community association in Rijeka's Skurinje neighborhood. For the period of this project, they were responsible for activities in the neighbourhood projected to be part of the Rijeka 2020 European Capital of Culture program, which was dramatically changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Performative design is a collective working with socially-oriented applied methodologies from various design and performative arts practices.

When the crisis emerged, we came up with a self-support system: we started a remote exchange through the pandemic, talking to each other and sharing our thoughts about what was happening around us and the world at large. We realized that food is one the best instruments for inspiring participation. We explored three themes and three food-related processes: mushrooms and their mycelial networks (the "hidden kingdom"), *kvass* and fermentation, and the doughnut (an object with a secret hole) as a special session for younger participants. All of these food objects provided a metaphorical and abstract framework for discussions on how

to organize, communicate, build patience and resilience, and have fun. They allowed us to create and (re)discover special occasions on which to be present every day.

These experiments were happening at the very beginning of the pandemic. It was double trouble: firstly everyone was stuck at their homes, either alone or overcrowded. Secondly, it served as a test of bravery as the participants received parcels of quite unfamiliar food from Lithuania, which they cooked and tasted together virtually on screens connecting three countries. For all who participated, the fun and playfulness in these activities kept us going. It was a fantasy experiment, creating a Lithuanian setting in Croatian homes through taste and aromas in the kitchen, which sparked many conversation topics and sharing of ideas.

The idea behind this hybrid tool—connecting the analog and the digital—is fairly simple. It involved three steps: establishing a respectable cultural institution to organize the process (in our case, a fictional Lithuanian Culture Center), sampling and sending samples of unknown cultural specimens, and providing clear instructions for unclear outcomes.

What did we learn from this process? First of all, there is no way to be prepared for the great unknown. The most crucial thing in such times is to be with people who are interested in building and creating new ideas, no matter the size and no matter how fictional they are at first glance.

If the activities are aimed at cultural experimentation, individual and communal imagination, it allows for participants to explore their capacities in building something together. Participating organizations have done interesting projects in their communities which are non transferable, but revolving and placing ideas in new contexts can be fun, productive and even tasty.

The following letters are excerpts from a set of instructions sent by partners from City 1 (in this case, Vilnius, Lithuania) to partners of City 2 (Rijeka, Croatia). Each was sent along with a package containing ingredients that the participants used to cook at home, while all partners connected online to cook together via Zoom. The cooking instructions provided a metaphor for thinking about their real-life project: exploring the possibility of opening up a cultural center in their neighborhood. We are sharing the instructions with you to provide you with some inspiration for your own food-themed hybrid explorations.

Package 1
The Mushroom Soup

Dear friends,

This message is reaching you across four countries and no sea. It is brought to you by the Lithuanian Cultural Center, department for future and heritage food. With a message and a parcel, we are aiming to start a conversation about your future cultural center.

What you have received is an unidentified object; you might say it is a mushroom—but is it really so?

What is mushroom? What is culture? And what do you know about mushroom culture?

Find a comfortable seating position and place the parcel on a clean surface. Wash your hands (always wash your hands!). Now open the bag and take one of the items out of the parcel. Hold it in two fingers and lift it in front of the light source.

Think about what it reminds you of and find similarly shaped objects. Could it be a rock? Could it be a piece of land?

If you could magnify it, could it become a perfect house for you? Or maybe a cultural center?

As a next step, move the item closer to your nostrils and take a deep breath. Draw the first memory or image that comes into your mind on the paper sheet provided.

By now, you might naturally be asking—why am I doing this? Could people live without culture? Could the planet live without mushroom cultures? They say it takes 6 easy steps to start a mushroom culture; would it take 6 easy steps to start a cultural center? We propose that the first step in making a cultural center is cooking a mushroom soup together in 6 easy steps.

Instructions

1. Wait for our first meeting on Zoom;

2. Find a recipe of your favourite mushroom soup (if you do not have any, it's time to call your mother—literally or figuratively—do not forget we can all be our own mothers);

3. Buy the ingredients for the soup in advance;

4. Prepare your kitchen for a "livestreaming kitchen show";

5. Follow the Zoom link and connect, lose connection, reconnect...

6. Talk to us and each other and cook the soup at the same time (the soup might not be the peak of your cooking. It might not even taste very good; still, you can pretend that it's the best soup you ever had. No one will know.)

Package 2
Fermentation (as) culture

Dear friends,

During our last meeting, we created a fungi-based cultural network across four countries and no sea. Some people call it mycelium, they say it's underground; we say it's culture and it's everywhere.

This second message from your department for future and heritage food hopes to ignite and spread a conversation about your future cultural center. We do not seek any world domination. Our efforts are selfless. We are an underground and overground and groundless network that allows communities to get their nutrients from deep under.

Do you use nutritional yeast? Do you wake it up with some warm water and some sugar? And then feed it with nutritious grains - flour? Has this culture colonized your home that you have no idea how to start breakfast without? Can you smell this culture entering the shop or a cafe?

You guessed it right - you have received an object that was produced with the help of this culture. Some people call it dried bread—but people might give the strangest names to things.

Now, find a comfortable seating position and place the parcel on a clean surface, wash your hands (always wash your hands!).

Open the box and take a deep breath. Let it touch your lungs. Breathe out.

Our sense of smell is like a portal. Where does it take you? Maybe it will transport you just a few days back or maybe decades into the future, to the well established Cultural Center in your neighborhood?

Come back to the present moment and take out some of the pieces, hold them carefully and lift them in front of the light source. Could those pieces be rocks, bricks or any other building material? What if they were magnified—could they become a perfect material to build a cultural center from? Would you let kids in your neighbourhood play with them? Would you play with them yourself?

They (the same people who called the parcel dried bread) say that simple things are the hardest to get right. Sorry to disappoint them: this is the perfect entry-level activity—everyone can do it perfectly. Just a few simple ingredients and a couple of days, and you will have Homemade *Kvass*.

Instructions

1. Start the preparation process one to two days before our meeting;

2. You have received 200 grams of dried bread. You can dry it a bit more in your oven; it should be even darker;

3. In a clean pot or glass jar, pour 3 liters of boiling water and add the bread. Close the container and let the liquid cool down until room temperature. After an hour, filter the liquid—the bread has done its job.

4. Leave it for a few moments. Use the leftover bread to make a logo for your future cultural center out of that material. Put it into the oven and dry it again;

5. Measure one glass of sugar. One spoon of this sugar should be mixed with approximatelly 30 g of yeast. Add sugar into the container and stir the liquid. Add yeast as well. Try to keep everything warm;

6. You can add local wild mint or other aromaticherbs or raisins into the liquid, but we suggest keeping it as simple as possible;

7. Keep everything in the original container, covered with a clean towel, or transfer the contents into a fermenting bucket fitted with an airlock. Ferment for around 8 to 12 hours, until you see some bubbles; then strain the liquid into a bottle if you want carbonation.

Cheers to your future
Cultural Center!

CUP or volva

ATTACHMENT OF LAMELLAE
Emarginate

STEM
Also called stalk or stipe
(sometimes hollow)

CAP
Also called pileus

MYCELIA
Long, stringy, underground
fungal filaments which combine
to create the mushroom

GILLS
Gills come in many
shapes and forms

RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

The Utopia for Dystopian Urban Futures

BY TEODORA BORGHOFF*

When our team from Timișoara, Romania, was selected for the 2017-2019 Actors of Urban Change program, our application's key word was "resilience." During our project, we not only explored this concept locally but were also fortunate enough to connect with people at the core of international urban resilience networks.

* Team Timisoara, ACT 2017-19

RESILIENCE: JUST ANOTHER BUZZWORD?

Outside academic circles, there are at least two major global players who promote the concept of resilience: the United Nations' UN-Habitat programme, which assesses local governments' urban resilience through the City Resilience Profiling Tool (CRPT); and the Rockefeller Foundation, which initiated the "100 Resilient Cities" network. The Rockefeller Foundation defines urban resilience as "the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, and systems within a city to survive, adapt, and grow no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience." The foundation elaborates on the concept with four core dimensions: leadership and strategy, health and well-being, economy and society, and infrastructure and environment.

Although resilience may seem like just another urban-change buzzword, I first grew attached to it in another context. My basic training is in social work, where resilience is often used in discussions about overcoming abuse and individual trauma. One child in a dysfunctional family may become an overachiever while their sibling may end up socially crippled or dependent on state support. The determining factor in these differences often comes down to this magic capacity of resilience.

My interest in resilience also connects with another professional interest from my younger years: the environment. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the buzzword was sustainability. Increasingly certain that human social and economic systems were incapable of refraining from environmental destruction, a new generation of scientists brought this concept to the world stage. Today, however, we are no longer talking about the luxury of choosing sustainability, but about bracing for the worst and learning to cope. Today, we must learn to be resilient at a planetary scale.

DYSTOPIAN FUTURES AND CULTIVATING RESILIENCE

Starting from this background, I spent 2018 trying to imagine all kinds of dystopian futures for my hometown, with a particular focus on "resilience factors" and how we might intentionally cultivate them. Our Actors of Urban Change team was concerned with both the sudden shocks and longer-term challenges that can harm cities. We looked at disaster preparedness and response as well as chronic stresses like climate change, aging, and migration. We ultimately presented the city with a strategy for transforming its neglected network of flood prevention channels into blue-green corridors that would enhance connectivity, mobility, and wellbeing.

Then the pandemic hit. It was unlike anything our team had ever imagined. During the lockdowns that followed, I realized that "urban resilience" is too focused on our external worlds—on city spaces and political and infrastructural systems, in short, everything beyond the individual. And yet, to properly face our new pandemic reality, we were all forced to acknowledge our individual fragilities and strengths, to take a deep dive into ourselves and assess how we would move forward. The link between this painful individual experience and impersonal urban systems is "community," another overused buzzword.

We are no longer talking about the luxury of choosing sustainability, but about bracing for the worst and learning to cope.

Today, we must learn to be resilient at a planetary scale.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY

Since 2016, I have been part of the Community Foundation in Timișoara. As an independent philanthropic institution, the foundation has a broad mission to improve quality of life in its community. As the pandemic began in early 2020, the first response of my colleagues in the foundation was to call local hospitals and ask what they needed. The next few months were a crazy race to raise funds, acquire and distribute medical equipment, and coordinate volunteers. After the initial shock and response came a second fundraising campaign that surpassed all expectations. And this time, with the benefit of experience, we were able to more clearly assess the community's needs in order to better direct support to areas where the public administration systems were too slow to adapt to the new reality.

We were one of hundreds of similar organisations in Europe and worldwide that stepped in, bridging individual needs with disrupted social systems. We were part of that magic "something" that made a difference when it came to how urban residents experienced the pandemic.

BACK TO BUSINESS:
RESILIENCE AND URBAN CHANGE

As soon as we could get back to the business of urban change, I asked myself again, "what are our resilience factors and can we cultivate them?" We invited NGOs from Timișoara to propose projects to reconnect the people of the city in public spaces. Interestingly enough, the same people who volunteered to deliver food during the pandemic got reconnected to familiar urban themes like food

waste, migration, accessibility, elderly services, biodiversity, and education. They continue to weave that web of connections that made the pandemic more bearable. These are the quality relationships that make me feel we are a community and that, together, we can withstand even worse than this pandemic.

RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

My utopia for a dystopian urban future is based on "resilient communities": social units of individuals who are able to connect and create those feelings and associations of mutual well-being and togetherness, no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience. These resilient communities are like those families who remain together and whose members love each other and live long healthy lives, despite hardship and losses.

This is no easy task, which is why we need to remain actors of urban change: passionate about our cities, connecting and innovating like children who, through play, become resilient beings.

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The Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH is one of Europe's largest foundations associated with a private company. In its charitable work, it addresses social issues at an early stage and develops exemplary solutions. For this purpose, it plans and implements its own projects. Additionally, it supports third-party initiatives that have similar goals. The Robert Bosch Stiftung is active in the areas of health, science, society, education, and international relations.

Since it was established in 1964, the Robert Bosch Stiftung has invested around 1.8 billion euros in charitable work.

MitOst connects active citizens in an open and diverse network in Europe and its neighboring regions. We encourage activities and implement programs that foster cultural exchange, active citizenship, social cohesion, and sustainable urban and rural development—beyond cultural, sectoral, or linguistic borders.

The content of this publication has been compiled with meticulous care and to the best of our knowledge. However, we cannot assume any liability for the up-to-dateness, completeness, or accuracy of any of the pages.

Past Present Futures of Urban Change