5. Participatory Strategies

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• participants should all have a chance to contribute;
• participants should not be judgemental or negative towards one another;
• all participants have something to contribute to the project.

Activities should take into account the participants' culture, age, language, abilities and personalities, and can be encouraged, but never forced. Physical activities can break the ice, especially if language barriers exist within the group.

The PACO Design Collaborative has drafted a guide for NGOs, social entrepreneurs and practitioners seeking to work with marginalised communities using elements from design practice and participatory service design. The toolbook contains useful and simple-to-use activities and tools which can promote dialogue and creativity within participating groups.
www.pacollaborative.com

While the cultural field is shaped by interactions between people, some forms of cultural expression tend to be receptive (simply attending a performance, for example) while others are more participatory. Brown, Novak-Leonard & Gilbride (2011, p.5) have identified a spectrum that helps to distinguish between different types of interaction between artists and audience. At one extreme, the audience is involved in 'spectating' (receiving the end-result of an artist's work). Still receptive but more engaging than 'spectating' is 'enhanced engagement' (enrichment programmes that do not involve audience participation). Then, within the participatory range of the spectrum, one finds 'crowdsourcing' (audience members are involved in certain artistic choices), 'co-creation' (audience members contribute to some aspect of an event or product) and, at the highest level, ''audience-as-artist' (control over process is entirely in the hands of the audience).

Creating a sense of community

The beginning of a project's activities may be the first time that participants, artists, and anyone else taking part are meeting each other. During this delicate time, it is important to create a safe space, where participants can build a sense of belonging and trust.

The setting of ground rules within which the group can work help to establish a safe space for all participants is an important step. Rules can include:

• all that is shared during these meetings is treated confidentially;
• participants should show kindness towards one another;

• 2 lies and a truth is another self-introduction activity for groups of 4 - 6. Each participant thinks of two true facts which can describe them, and a lie. As each participant introduces themselves, they present the three as 'facts' - other participants need to guess which is true and which is false.

As time goes by, sessions can begin with warm-up activities, or, depending on the needs of the participants, visualisation and relaxation exercises. An experienced practitioner may be able to sense the group's atmosphere as participants enter the space, or even ask people directly how they are feeling, and how the group is doing.

• Breathing exercises can begin with the group lying on their backs with eyes closed. Participants can slow-breathe in good energy, and take a strong breath out to allow stresses to go with it. Ask the participants to visualise their day so far and think of things that caused them stress. Then ask participants to sit up, and write down these thoughts on a paper, and finally to place these thoughts into a bag which is then thrown out of the room.

A guided visualisation, carried out in a relaxed environment, can lead participants to draw upon their own personal experiences and emotions and encourage creativity.

• Visualisation can begin once participants are lying down comfortably. Invite them to breathe deeply, and move into a 'body scan' where each area of the body is encouraged to relax

Collaborative activities

Most ice-breaking activities start with the group in a circle - a democratic equitable shape with no hierarchies. Some groups may find it easy to work together, but others may need some encouragement to interact. Ice-breaking activities can form a sense of community at the beginning of a project.

• The name game is a fun self-introduction activity. Each participant thinks of something they like doing, starting with the same letter as their first name. In turn, each participant will introduce themselves and mime their activity. So, Daniel will announce that he likes dancing, Francesca will say that she likes flying.

through a series of prompts: 'Imagine you are lying down by the sea with your eyes closed. Listen to the sounds of the waves of the sea…pause…Are there any other sounds you can hear?…pause…What month of the year is it?…pause…What time of day is it?…pause… Where is this beach? How are you feeling?… pause…Why?' The prompts can continue until participants are completely relaxed. www.innerhealthstudio.com

Teamwork activities can encourage collaboration within a group, and instil a sense of fun and camaraderie in the project as a whole.

• The Marshmallow Challenge engages the group in collaborative visualisation and design activities. In groups of four, participants are given 20 sticks of spaghetti, 1 metre of tape, 1 metre of string, and one marshmallow. Each team aims to build the tallest freestanding structure they can with the marshmallow on top, with a strict time limit of 18 minutes to finish the task. (Wujec, 2010)

• Guess The Leader teaches much about group dynamics, the power of observation and concentration. One participant - the investigator - leaves the room until another participant is appointed 'leader'. With the group in a circle and music playing, the group will copy the dance moves of the leader as closely as possible. The investigator stands in the middle of the circle, and attempts to identify the leader. The better the teamwork and observation skills of the group the tougher it is for the investigator. Any strategies the team

may use to hide the leader's identity must be worked out without speaking. (Farmer, 2011)

Once the participants have become more familiar with each other, some exercises can work well at the end of a session to allow the group to reflect on what they have achieved together.

• Common Positivity can allow a group to appreciate each other's strengths. Participants stick a piece of paper onto each other's backs. Everyone in the group writes something positive on each participant's back, making sure that what they write is sincere, and different from the other statements that have already been already written about that person. Following this, each participant removes the piece of paper, and goes to a quiet space to read what has been written about them. A conversation at the end will emphasise the importance of seeing the positive in others and realising it about ourselves.

• Following a set of activities, a reflection circle can allow participants to share some thoughts. This can include a discussion on which negotiation strategies worked, and which didn't, what could have been done better, and which skills were needed to carry out the activities.

Engaging online media

Whether through choice or necessity, a project may need to engage its participants in an online setting. This can present challenges, especially with participants who are not comfortable using digital platforms. But it can also present opportunities, such as working with communities or artists who are physically distant, or allowing people to collaborate at their own pace, and in their own time. While inequalities may appear in terms of access to internet connectivity, working online can also allow a community to work on a more equal footing, without physical or geographical differences.

It is always simpler to make use of established and popular platforms in order to shift a

project from in-person to online participation. Once participants' skills and preferences of your participants are identified, more complex tools and resources can be used. This section focuses on how to initiate and strengthen online activity for a community. An appropriate choice of media with suitable activities - while taking precautions for participants' personal information - can create a digital solidarity within the project.

Before encouraging participants to interact online, participants will need to be aware of how to protect their personal identities online, how to grant or deny consent for their data, and how to protect themselves online.

The digital self-defence database Defend our Movements offers information and resources on how to defend personal information and make various online platforms secure. Participants can learn how to be safe when using everyday communication over Gmail, Facebook and Instagram, and Zoom, or can learn to protect their phones in more serious situations such as protests or other crises.
www.defendourmovements.org

Whether the online skills of the participants you are working with are limited to sharing content, or advanced enough to develop an online service, this section asks two main questions for every online engagement:

• What data is captured?
• By whom and for whom is the tool made?

Collaborative tools can be used to host participants and engage them in a simple task, at the same time identifying their online skills and preferences.

Light exercises in online writing and reading are a good way of engaging a mixed bag of skills - following this, the participants can 'breakout' into groups for a more active contribution. Below are a few platforms that can be used easily for a group to communicate:

• Google Docs is a good option for general audiences to run an ice-breaker over text;

• If participants are confident in working online, the open-source, web-based collaborative real-time editor Etherpad can be used. It is non-extractive, and as such, a community's data cannot be automatically scraped;

• Alternatively, drawing pads such as the WBO Collaborative White Board or Excalidraw, can also be used to remix each other's work with basic shapes, as well as with rough sketches.

Inspired by the novella Le Petit Prince, Aaron Koblin developed a collection of 10,000 sheep from an online drawing pad. His project used Amazon's Mechanical Turk to engage participants in exchange for a fee of €0.02 and invite them to draw a sheep. Online drawing is constrained by sharp movements over a small trackpad, or a small screen by its mobile version. Rather than focusing on what's realistic and efficient in every drawing, the artist focused on how such a simple task can take
on new value under the guise of a corpus of online activity.
www.aaronkoblin.com/work/thesheepmarket

As time goes by, participants can be engaged on a more complex and critical level:

• Participants can be engaged in small groups, through a collective reading session over Google Docs or an Etherpad. The host can provide excerpts from narrative fiction about online autonomy.

• As a follow-up, participants who share an interest can be invited to engage in discussion on a specific topic, and develop it with another excerpt. These links can be prepared in advance, and the group can break up into separate pads to do so.

• Alternatively, experienced participants can be invited to use social media tools (which are generally used for aggressive media campaigns) to understand how they work with a practical example. If directed with a sense of irony and lightness, this process can help identify how the online activities of one person can also play a part in a much wider circle of political influence.

The artist Jonas Lund frequently engages participants in a critical position. His project Operation Earnest Voice took on the role of a marketing agency, inviting participants to campaign against fake news with the same tools used to support Brexit. This included chat bots to derail online conversations,

sock-puppet profiles and twitter bots, among other tools used by world powers. In addition, a few participants were also invited to sign a highly transparent contract about consent, and take critical action with a sense of irony. This included engaging in corporate culture, such as team building activities, as well as automatically sharing data about themselves to online media.
www.operationearnestvoice.co.uk

Participants with more advanced skills can also access the code which maintains community-run platforms, using "open source" technology, whereby developer skills are mediated over fora hosted by Gitea.io, or more specific organisations such as Varia, or Homebrewserver, among others. In part with the Digital Solidarity Network these organisations aim to detract from centralised systems of control, and revert to in-house coding with a preference for privacy, autonomy, and social interest, as opposed to market-driven applications. Through the organisation of hackathons, small conferences, seminars, and workgroups, practitioners are invited to meet users and activists in order to further develop these resources together.

In addition to transparency with regard to coding, i.e. 'open source', the links noted here are also 'non extractive'. This is the characteristic which makes it difficult for online giants to harvest data from a participant's online activity. Therefore, it becomes very difficult to recollect it as a corpus of big data without the consent of each contributor from this community.

Itineraries is a series of publications by Constant, a small Brussels-based organisation. In order to mediate this process of solidarity, advanced participants are invited to modify, improve, or contribute to community run platforms by working directly with the users, such as other participants in a project, and identifying what a community needs on a practical level.
www.iterations.space/live/#resources

The Guardian Project has led the way in developing applications to secure a personal identity and protect participants interested in posting over public platforms. Their applications are used to deter unnecessary surveillance, such as wiping the geographical-metadata from an image being shared online, or simply, by automatically identifying each face in a photo, and blurring its details.
www.guardianproject.info

Working online also allows for a more active participation. Recent world events have seen artists and organisations use online platforms creatively to retain a sense of community, although participants may be separated physically. Below are just a few examples of community projects that can also work online:

• **Community choirs -** platforms such as Zoom can be used to bring together a large number of people online. Performances can be recorded or live-streamed.

• **Music -** participatory music activities in general can take place online. While some

negotiation will be needed for sound quality, depending on the technology available to the group, participatory rehearsals and even performances are possible.

• **Interactive Performances -** inventive use of communication platforms can allow participants and audiences to participate in performances, forming collaborative and experimental works.

• **Communicating from afar -** online platforms can be used to broaden a community's circle, and to collaborate with other communities further afield.

• **Pre-recorded activities -** participants can share recordings of themselves carrying out specific tasks, challenges or performances.

• **Voting -** while not applicable to all situations, online voting for preferences can allow a group to plan future activities.

Photovoice

One successful participatory action strategy is Photovoice. The strategy makes use of photography for positive social change, often partnering with individuals or other organisations to promote participatory photographic projects or workshops (https://photovoice.org).

The concept for Photovoice was developed by Wang and Burris (1997, p. 370), based on literature on critical consciousness, feminist theory, and documentary photography. The project works to provide equal representation, designing and delivering tailor-made participatory photography, digital storytelling and self-advocacy projects for socially excluded groups. Photovoice can offer unique contributions to exploration and empowerment of marginalized social groups. According to Wang and

Burris (1997), participants can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a photographic technique and as a practice based in the production of knowledge.

Photovoice's three main goals are:

• to enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns;

• to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussion of photographs;

• to reach policymakers and influence decision-making related to some social issues.

During a photovoice session, participants are required to take photographs related to a selected research problem, to choose a smaller number of photos and discuss a set of questions (SHOWD). Participants also write short texts describing their selected photos based on the above-listed questions. Support and training are given, as well as training in ethical standards, confidentiality and respect for the rights of other participants. Guiding items for use during photovoice sessions include the following, or similar questions:

• S = What do you SEE here?
• H = What is really HAPPENING?
• O = How does this relate to OUR lives?
• W = Why does this problem or strength exist?
• D = What can we DO about it?

Photovoice has been further developed and adapted to different social conditions by numerous researchers who contributed to the further development of this powerful action research tool (see for example Latz, 2012; Liebenberg, 2018; Migliorini & Rania, 2017; Wang & Hannes, 2020). Future research studies that apply this technique are expected to further develop this action research method through adaptation to the specific research objectives, needs and characteristics of different community members and their needs.

A wide array of studies that apply photovoice demonstrate the capability of this approach to contribute to the empowerment of marginalized social groups. The following are just some examples of Photovoice projects.

The photovoice method was used in a project involving women working in diverse aspects of the sex industry. The project aimed to understand sex workers' lived experiences through their own artistic self-representation, and to support the acknowledgement of individual strengths, skills, visions, and voice. Opportunities were provided for group dialogue, engagement in community education, and activism through art. Using the photovoice method in this context allowed photography to be used as an act of resistance to this stigma, and affirmed agency, self-representation, voice, and choice in sex work. (Desyllas, M. C., 2014)

The Language of Light Photovoice project enabled men and women living at a shelter in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to photograph their everyday

health, work, and life conditions in order to document their struggles and strengths; to promote critical dialogue through group discussion about their photographs; and to reach policy makers and the broader public about issues of concern to homeless people. The authors' approach used photovoice, an innovative participatory action research method based on health promotion principles and the theoretical literature on education for critical consciousness, feminist theory, and a community-based approach to documentary photography. (Wang, C. C., Cash, J. L., & Powers, L. S., 2000)

Photovoice methods were used in a Liverpool project exploring older people's perceptions of respect and social inclusion in cities. Four groups of older people from four contrasting geographical areas in Liverpool, the UK, took part in the project, photographing what they saw as positive and negative aspects of respect and social inclusion in the city, and reflecting on the meanings of the photographs with researchers. (Ronzi, S., Pope, D., Orton, L., & Bruce, N. 2016)

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RESOURCES

The resources listed below provide a list of platforms which depend on an alternative life-cycle, and favour community run platforms that are not driven by profit-making interests. This type of engagement can be taxing on both a technical and political level for any participant. In part with applications and solutions, several organisations are also issuing guidelines for careful mediation and online engagement.

• **Constant** - Publications, webinars, guidelines, and practical tools for an alternative infrastructure, as well as some information for online educators, including a link to web conferencing platforms which highlight autonomy, and privacy.

• **DataDetoxkit** - A collection of guides for basic users interested or in favour of wellbeing, social cohesion, and security, for engaging with online media. It also includes an alternative app centre for beginners interested in finding replacements for mainstream services, such as search engines, internet browsers, messaging services among other applications we use on a daily basis.

• **Defend Our Movements, Digital Self Defense Curriculum** - An online, collaborative source of information and resources about protecting data.

• **Fediverse** - A collection of social media platforms that can provide an alternative to mainstream platforms.

• **FemtechNet** - A network of scholars, artists and students working on, with and at the borders of technology science, and feminism with an interest in pedagogy and technology. For guidelines on moderating with care, and engaging digital tools for learning in schools, colleges, and universities.

• **The Guardian Project** - A collection of applications developed to secure smartphones by prioritising anonymity and privacy. This includes simple tools to blur faces and wipe out gps tags on images, such as Obscura Cam and Scrambled Exif, or to send a warning if in danger, such as the Ripple application, or to identify what information is being surveilled without explicit consent of the user.

The networks listed below are based on a federated network developed by a community of people around the globe and independent from any corporation or official institution.

• **Bibliotecha** - A framework to facilitate the local distribution of digital publications within a small community, relying on a microcomputer running open-source software to serve books over a local wifi hotspot.

• **Calibre** - A powerful and easy to use e-book manager, part of an open-source community with half a dozen developers and many, many testers and bug reporters, used in over 200 countries and translated into a dozen different languages by volunteers.

• Drawing Board Excalidraw - A whiteboard tool that allows for easy sketching and diagrams, with a hand-drawn feel. Anything which is scribbled on this board is also carried over to storage with end-to-end encryption.

• Drawing Board WBO Collaborative White Board - A free and open-source online collaborative whiteboard that allows many users to draw simultaneously on a large virtual board. The board is updated in real time for all connected users, and its state is always persisted. It can be used for many different purposes, including art, entertainment, design and teaching.

• Framasoft - An organisational tool to create personal calendars, events, as well as collaborate with others over spreadsheets, writing pads, and scheduling tasks. It is open source and non-extractive; thereby, no one has access to the data except its users.

• Office Suite Crypt Pad - An office suite to create documents with 100% encryption. This includes presentations, documents which are rich in text and typography, as well as spreadsheets and polls, among other types of documents.