

How do we start? Where do we go? Ideas Bank – exploring questions in the space

Our purpose with the "Ideas Bank" phase in the Artivism project was to invite young people for a joint reflection on what bothers them in their society – or their immediate surroundings; what it is that they would like to change. In this phase we worked in different settings in four cities with different approaches. In the followings you can read about our methods and the development of the process.

Despite the fact that the partners worked with very different groups, in disparate contexts and diverse methodologies, all the four processes were linked in a way to a definite physical space: either to the very center of Nottingham, or to selected districts of Madrid, another to symbolical places in Budapest, the last to an innovative housing project in Paris offering residence to migrants and working space to artists and NGOs, in Paris. This shows our common belief: the space we live in reflects the problems and questions related our coexistence, or also our society. This strong connection to the public space comes is developed in more details later at the chapter about the creative campaigns and actions. In the following first we'll start with the description of three variations of an urban walking methodology to collect ideas. Then we offer a more structured 'recipie' on two further techniques to identify the subjects that matter: the newspaper theater and the abecedarium.

Urban walk and discussion in Nottingham

The walk

We had a couple of students from the media practice course at NTU who were responsible for taking pictures and recoding the event.

We distributed the map of the city centre with a line in red showing the itinerary of the places we were to follow. We suggested them to walk in pairs but this was not followed by them as they, in an organic manner, chose their little groups. soon they were all interacting with different people in the group. During the walk we interacted with all the groups and explained the historical importance of the area for Nottingham city. After lunch we noticed that they were really comfortable with each other and we attributed that to 45 minutes walk when they felt free to express their views without being judged by the group and created a bond for the rest of the day which was very productive for the second part of the day.

Discussion and mapping

The methodology used for the discussion included first small groups evaluating their views on issues that were triggered during the walk. And then on the second moment the participants would discuss all together.

After lunch we divided them into small groups according to their preferences and started the discussion based on the elements we set up prior to the event:

(re)discover citizenship,
engage with their communities,
discuss issues of relevance to their daily-life in Nottingham;
Main concerns regarding Nottingham

Potential issues for discussion:

The topics to trigger a discussion included among others:

Issues of belonging in relation to Nottingham/UK

What public spaces participants recognise as their?

Where participants feel excluded? What are the reasons?

Where do they feel safe/unsafe?

Think about both structural and subtle issues of exclusion and discrimination locally.

Broad areas include:



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education, housing, urban planning, safety & crime, gender, racism, religion, sexual orientation and any other axis of social inequality.

What do they think are issues that need to be addressed locally that are not being addressed?

What would you like to see in Nottingham (whether a structure, program, funding, local action, etc.), that does not currently exist?

In small groups (2 groups of 3 participants and 1 with four participants) they discussed what they observed during the walk and how they related those issues to the areas where they live in Nottingham.

After that, the discussion was with the whole group when they presented their different issues. They had some disagreements about a few issues such as lack of green spaces and difficulties to cycle in the city. Mostly they agreed with each other on the issues presented. At that point, we started to register their issues in the white board to create a map of the problems raised.

Ideas Marathon, walking interviews in Madrid

#lasmilyunacarasdelaciudad

In Madrid, the first phase consisted of generating ideas through interactive methodology, the so called *ideas marathon* via Twitter where young people of the age between 18 and 28 years old, were invited to upload photos and leave comments about the urban space they inhabit under the following core questions: What are the social and political issues, problems that they feel relevant? How do young people feel about public space? What current urban/social conflictivity do they perceive?

The *hashtags* we used was called *#lasmilyunacarasdelaciudad*. Some of the images uploaded by the young people were the following:

Most of the problems detected have to do with poverty, center-periphery conflicts, contrasts but also with disorder in the public space or pollution.

After this first phase, the participants had to choose an area of Madrid where they made walks observing the surroundings, taking interviews, images and videos trying to deepen in the problems previously detected.

Interviews and discussions

These urban walks were followed by brief discussions where we focused on the following aspects: (re)discover citizenship, engage with communities, discuss issues of relevance to their daily-life.

Apart from the residential districts, the participants chose for their itineraries the downtown area and the University Campus. The results of the itinerary in Ciudad Universitaria (Campus Complutense University) were highly surprising because they touched somehow a series of problems that, exposed together, constructed a new perception about the place. During the subsequent debate, the group (university students aged 20-21) claim not to feel this space as their own. They perceive the campus is a lifeless, sterile space where they come to study and then, take the subway, as fast as possible, to get away.

It is not a place where you feel comfortable. In the spaces between faculties, there is nothing, nothing happens. The faculties are isolated, enclosed in themselves.

During the debate, some young people express the idea that the result of this organization of the space was that contacts have been weakened, gatherings and also protests have been reduced. The university has lost voice and weight, it is no longer in the forefront of the great movements.

Added to these problems is the fact that students do not feel safe in the campus. At night, there are spaces without lighting; no buses and in time of exams, they have to walk large distances from the library to the metro station. By day and night, the green areas hide scenes like the one described by the participants in the itinerary:

... to encounter a tree where a man has all his belongings, is that probably no one has ever noticed his presence, and no one has ever considered the denigrating of that situation and, therefore, no one have sought a solution either.



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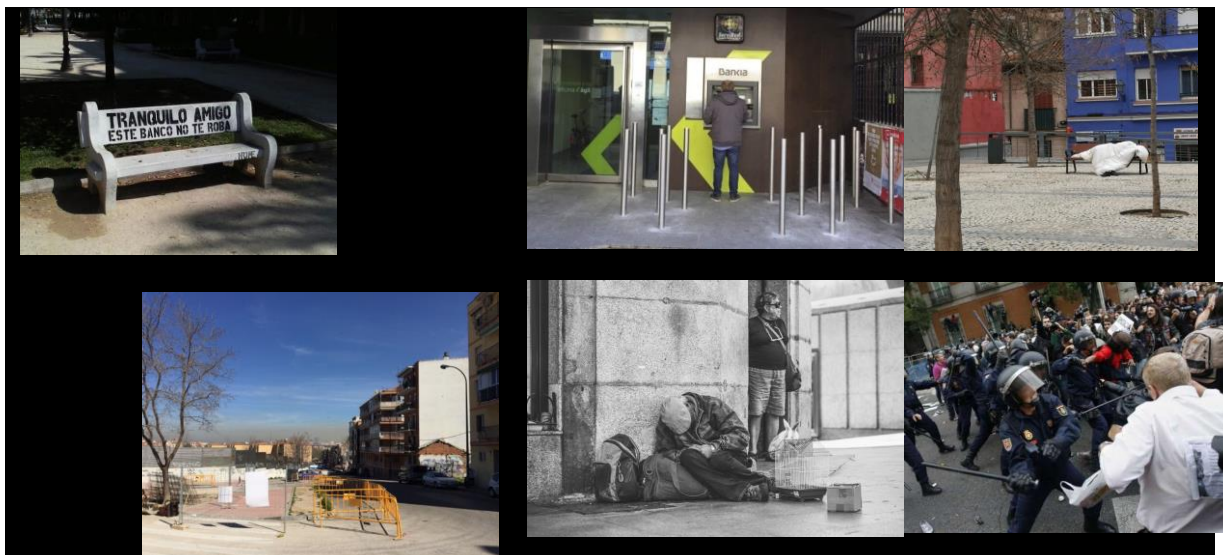


While young people seem to easily detect problems in residential and/or proximity zones, this was not the case for other areas such as the city's downtown. Surprisingly, itineraries in the most central areas of Madrid, Barrio de las Letras and Sol, remained in failed attempts to approach the problems that are hidden there. In the case of the Barrio de las Letras, the participants stated that they had not detected any problems and also that in the conversations with people living there, they had been told that it is a very quiet neighborhood without any alterations. The three images that the participants uploaded to Twitter were general plans focused on cultural aspects: theater, poetry, libraries, etc.

In the case of the other central zone, the Sol Plaza, the itinerary was organized by a group where participants were young women in the age of 20-22. During the debate, we were shown a recording composed of general plans that resembled what will be a quick look, which does not stop at any detail, even, feels uncomfortable, wants to leave the place as soon as possible. The young women said that one of the most worrying problems in the area was prostitution. They told us that, at first, they had planned to approach and talk to the prostitutes, but in the end they had considered it very dangerous.

Discussion with Expert

After discovering that one of the main problems that our young people are worried about was the organization of public space and its repercussion on social dynamics, we decided to organize a seminar with the young architect, Marta Kayser. The architect proposed as a task a reflection on how the University Campus could change.



City Game in Budapest

Travel to the future

The aim was to create a framework that feeds our idea bank and serves the recruitment of our activism working group. In the planning phase the staff of Artemisszió took part, and volunteers from our community were involved in the process of the creation. They helped us to finalize the narrative, and they had the host role at the stations.

After studying different methodologies we imagined to combine different approaches as city walking discussion of social issues, creative/artistic methodologies, observation of the public space and documentation by photos and the articulation of ideas of change. To reach this we created a narrative frame of a dystopian future, the



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state of individuals, where the Hungarian society might arrive until 2217, if we don't try to stop or change the processes. The narrative had a negative tone on purpose, similarly with the performance structure of the forum theatre by showing the possible negative consequences this way we wanted to raise awareness and call for act of change. The narrative presented a country that was Hungary before, but now it is called the state of individuals, formed after trying a failed cooperation with other counties or among the different social groups. Here only the Few can access education, the freedom of speech is very limited, the poor people are invisible as they don't deserve to be seen. The different characteristics of this reality were revealed at the different stations of the game.

The guide book for the game was the passport what the participants received at the start of the game, together with the general instructions, the universal description of the state.

The passport contained:

- initial activities to personalize the document (to create individual and group profile)
- quiz with questions related to the topics of the stations (to raise awareness and curiosity)
- guidelines and instructions about how to take pictures in an ethical way and a contact email where to send the pictures taken along the way
- list of the stations and a vague map of the locations (so that the participants have an idea where they could be, but are challenged as well to find these)
- blank pages for notes
- information about Artemisszió and the activism project

The quiz tackled the topics of the game in an ironic way, 3 multiple choice questions belonged to each issue (migration, poverty/homelessness, freedom of speech, education and corruption).



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Stations

The stations represented different aspects of this reality in connection with social questions, placed in Symbolic city spaces of a certain social issue, that are present in the common reference frame of the locals of Budapest, but might not be visible already for everyone like prostitution and poverty at Rákóczi tér; or recently was associated to a topic like Oktogon square as of the protests earlier in 2017.

The route was the following: 1. Universe gate 2. Zone of the unseeable 3. Square of the failed revolution 4. Zone of the few 5. Museum of the trees. The participants had the chance to receive the right answers for the quiz questions, discuss them with the volunteers and get involved in the creative tasks related to the topic of the station. For example at the first station after getting into the role of time-traveler “migrant” the participants answered the questions on a paper: 3 social problems that make me angry // 3 things I want to change in the world // 3 things we shouldn’t bring with us to the future. After that we created an image of the list together with the participant to start the photo collection process (the images were uploaded to the instagram account [artivizmusbudapest](#)).

Some answers from the images: 3 things we shouldn’t bring to the future:

- 1. Mass social institutions, 2. Empty houses, 3. Bad bike lines.
- 1. Disproportionate wage 2. Extreme poverty 3. Police state.

At the zone of the useable images were shown about the square from different historical periods, where poverty, prostitution and also the failed Hungarian revolution could be spotted. The task was to put the images in a chronological order and at the end draw the image of the square in 2217 resolving (and not erasing!) The social problem that is visible in the very space (homelessness).

At the freedom of speech station (square of the failed revolution) the travelers had the chance to create badges with a message they would write on themselves or would fight for. The space and the badge itself were symbolic, because of the protests mentioned above which were organized as a reaction to the closure of a private university (central European university – ceu) and the button saying “I stand with ceu” was a very emblematic part of the resistance in this situation.

In this case we wanted to invite the participants for a visual focused creation, as at the previous station which was related to corruption (Museum of the trees) the creative task was to write a message, paint it on cardboard and create protest signs from them.

At the zone of the few the participants were invited to step in a role play, after receiving characters from the future, symbolizing different members of the society, and after a short exercise helping them to associate with the role they were asked to take one step forward after listening to various statements (told by the host volunteer) in case they feel that their character has the freedom and chance to take that step in his/her life (ex.



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I can fall in love and be engaged in a relationship with the person i choose; I can afford to go on holidays at least once per year).

We planned the game to last around 3 hours, but it turned out that if the group walked, talked and observed (and had some food in between too) it took more or less 4-5 hours to do the whole path. Despite this challenging length almost all of the groups arrived to the final station, although they were very tired and due to this less focused.

Reflections on challenges, results, concerns:

For some reason the part where the participants would take pictures on the way (while walking and observing the public space, looking for activist creations) didn't work at all, although the volunteers asked the groups at the arrival to the stations to show the image(s) (at least 1) which was an entry point to start the activities there. All the groups showed images, but not one arrived to the email address given in the passport.

The whole duration of the game was too extended mainly due to the longer distance between the stations – when the participants arrived to the last station they were exhausted. We would suggest to place the stations closer to each other.



Abecedarium in Paris

The abecedarium – a conventional instrument for young students to learn the alphabet -can also become a useful tool at the service of artists. Sometimes merely used as a form to present samples of typography, it can also be applied to create subjective and or collective inventories of concepts related to specific themes.

In the activism project we have used the abecedarium with a variety of groups: in the Paris workshops we have invited young migrants to create an abecedarium of the housing project where they were staying (Les Grands Voisins). We have proposed it in international youth workshops as an entry point to open up big concepts such as “gender” “racism” and “inequality”. With a group of trainers / youth workers we have worked together to explore the word “migration”. In each occasion the abecedarium proved to be an easy practical tool to access and share deeper meanings. Here is how we did it in our first session.

We created four groups randomly, then we asked them to pick a piece of paper that contains a letter, we had the entire French alphabet in small pieces of paper inside a jar.

Then we asked everyone to find a word that describing the Grands Voisins where all the residents live.

Each members of the 4 groups discussed among them the words that they found, it was rich discussion with diverse points of views



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For more details, have a look at the activity description or the part of the website dedicated to the details of the collection process <http://artivism.online/collecting-ideas/>

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