

# LEARNING AND WORKING WITH ARTIVISM: PRACTISING THE DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

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This book focuses on a brand new phenomenon of our social time: *Artivism*, the mixture of Art and Activism. Although Artivism has been present in all Art history, it is now that it has become a real *social massive phenomenon* around the globe. Artivism has come to stay in our ecosystem of social life and action.

As the reader probably knows, our cultural environment is full with dozens of handbooks, tutorials and manuals for users in nearly every branch, aspect or type of technique, skill or knowledge in our planet. But to have a handbook does not necessarily drives you to a true contact with reality. Manuals and handbooks can be an obstacle to develop action and intervention. In fact, a handbook on Artivism, like a handbook on creativity, is a contradiction itself. The only way to learn and work with Artivism is throwing out handbooks and textbooks and starting to act.

The purpose of the Artivism project was to attend to the main traits and features of this specimen of cultural modern life, to study and to develop its deep nature, and very specially, to learn from Artivism and to put into practice artistic tools and dynamics, as a means of enabling and enacting the social transformation.

This project has been possible with the co-funding of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Commission, offering financial support to the activities developed in the four cities, led by our partner organisations: *Artemisszio Foundation* in Budapest, *the Faculty of Information Sciences of the Complutense University of Madrid*, *Nottingham Trent University* and *Élan interculturel* in Paris. Together we developed a series of invitations and activities to dive into, learn and put in practice the rich potential of artivism.

Artivism is a teaching tool. The artist expression of new ideas of social life is in fact a communicative device, which enables us to reproduce the same social demands through the creativity of our own hands. When students and youngsters enact and endorse artist practices, they empower themselves to participate, to engage in new ways and to innovate in their social contexts using these new techniques of *integration, self-liberation and creation*.

This book wants to explore how we can teach and learn activist ways of triggering *social transformation*, specially intended to the young people of our present societies, as they are the most deprived of power to intervene and to make social life evolve and respond to their needs...

Our description of activist specimens tries to show the huge variety of practices, discourses, communication processes and ways of doing new things, to integrate and collaborate in social transformative initiatives. There is a whole revolution in progress in the world of creativity, that is putting upside down the protocols, the rules, the conventions of modern art, redirecting them to the dynamics of social change. We have tried to document this big revolution in our images, videos and drawings and maps.

But we do not want to be only the ethnological descriptors and classifiers of an Activism archive: this was part of our preliminary tasks. In this book, most of all, we want to put this variety of forms and findings to the service of young people, young workers or unemployed kids and young citizens in their early life, where they need to change the relation with their physical, psychological and social environment, and they need to feel the power to act and make reality grow with them.

So Activism is here just as a new tool to change things in daily life: to integrate and to understand the relations between social groups and classes, to realize social space, social time and social emptiness of meaning, and the need to change the relation with them, in order to change the social construction of reality.

Workshops and campaigns of activism in the hands of youngsters do materialize the real problems they feel and they give real physical recognition to social inequality, gender and race violence, structural injustice and economic disaster. But as these workshops and campaigns really enact the empowering practices that can change things, from a newspaper cover to the color of a street poster, from the content of a book in a library to the message of an add in a bus, they constitute a really essential way of putting into practice the simple way of changing things, starting with the hands on the work itself.

When the campaigns convey social ideas perceived by these communities of young people, a real exorcism is to be felt and seen and we can document a whole new recognition in their world, as the first step to act to change it and react to the pressure to give up to it.

So our main effort in this book is to develop real Activist results, real campaigns in our cities starred by the youngsters, guided and taught also by activists, and conducted to the general intention to use these practices to

change attitudes, modes of feeling and modes of defining themselves, away from academical or school conventions and rules, from social definitions and discriminations, away from social constrictions of gender and class, to free and make flow the strength and dynamism they cannot normally channel to their lives.

In chapter 1 we start with a very brief introduction to the history of activism and an *abecedarium of activism*. This is an inventory, in alphabetical order, of the concepts that we found useful to reflect on and to integrate in our own activist campaigns. This is by no means the only possible abecedarium of activism, but it is ours. The best would be if you made your own. Not as a restrictive, rigid listing, rather as a creative flexible frame that helps you to remain aware of some concerns important for you.

The second chapter offers two case studies of the full processes of the activist project: one from Budapest and the other from Paris. The texts show how different phases of the work build on one another, how we started, with whom, what we did and hopefully also why.

Chapter three is an actual treasure box, conventionally called toolbox. It zooms on the activities that created to structure our work towards activism: how we identified the themes to work on, how we learnt different activist tools

of expression and how we prepared our public campaigns.

Finally, we close this not-handbook with some recommendations. Learning from one's own mistakes is probably one of the best way to learn, but maybe you can benefit from the mistakes of someone else. And of course, we also have something to be proud of.

We hope this book will illustrate and show clearly how all the steps we have taken have an only and unique scope, which is experimenting and enacting the new way of social empowerment and integration that uses activism as a way

of materialize the energy that new generations have, to liberate themselves and take the command of social transformation of our communities and human hubs.

