

1. CONTEXT: BORDERS TO CROSS

Since November 2015 the team of *élan interculturel* moved to «Les Grands Voisins», an abandoned hospital now hosting an exciting social initiative ran by a French NGO «Aurore». Les «Grands Voisins» offered residence free or at moderate price to almost 1000 people in difficult situations and in need of shelter, and serve as working space for more than a hundred NGOs, Artists, Startups, SMEs. After one year of living in «Les Grands Voisins» we realized that interactions between people live and people who work on the site are not so intense as we would have liked. Residents did not attend trainings and workshops we thought might be useful for them. Few residents or office dwellers crossed the symbolic borders that separated the spaces they occupied, each confined to their respective comfort zones. The cantina, which was expected to be a forum for encounters, ended up serving the workers and the young bohemian outsiders, much less the residents.

We welcomed the «Artivism project» as an opportunity that may just give us the excuse and the means to change our ways, do something differently. We extended the invitation to all youngsters who worked or lived on the site of Les Grands Voisins to work together. We moved out of our own comfort zone and presented our project of «learning to use the arts to communicate social and political ideas» at the residents' meeting in the space, which was to become a leisure center for the residents. We had moderate success: some were interested, but some others clearly not: one resident told us «I do not care to express myself this is a luxury for me, I've more important things to think about like life basics of finding my daily bread». But there is no way art workshops can become an occasion to contribute to daily bread?

Actually, there was, to a humble degree: we realized that one of the spaces of Grand Voisins called «Troc-shop» needed some interior design and decoration. This «Troc-shop» was a space for non-monetarized exchange, using the local currency of the site called «Time-coins», which enables the associations to hire the residents who don't have the legal status for different services so that they are paid in this local currency for which they can buy different goods in the «Troc-shop». So, under the guidance of artist Nina Lambert we proposed deco-design workshops as a means to work together with residents offering the participants a humble remuneration. Slow and lonely

at the beginning, the deco workshops became a fix point for working together, cutting patterns out of coloured paper, but most of all getting to know each other. Through two months of joint work, a core group of 20-30 years old young people started to take shape: most of them from Mali and Senegal, most of them men, and one lady from Cameroun became regular colleagues. After a while, we discovered that they were more motivated by the working together and the encounter than the small remuneration, which many of them simply declined. By the time we finished the decoration, our group was formed and we were ready to engage with our subject matter.



2. IDEAS BANK: THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES ARE IN OUR OWN BACKYARD

What happened in the deco workshops spontaneously and informally, later on became more regular and structured. Gradually we increased the rhythm and started to explore specific issues that were brought up by participants. First these subject matters were more general. Two of them seemed so interesting that we organized special expert sessions on them: the first focused on prejudice, discrimination and racism. This was a smaller interactive session where we explored together these concepts and how they impacted our own life as subjects and as perpetrators of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. The second subject was gender, relationship between men and women in an intercultural perspective.

However, slowly we realized that the most pressing issues, those that triggered the most emotions concerned the immediate environment of «Les Grands Voisins». The issue was clearly sensitive: Les Grands Voisins is a space which offers shelter, in a way is their home in Paris, and most participants had a feeling of gratitude and the impossibility to formulate criticism. But once, one participant mentioned how he felt that no one of the white people on the site ever looks at him. And this one comment opened the way to discussions about inequality, racism, anonymity, the lack of reciprocity.

To structure these discussions, in the beginning of May 2017, we did the ABCD session, in order to collect ideas we asked the participants to pick randomly a folded piece of paper that contains a letter of Latin alphabet and trying to find a word that related to the local life in «Les Grands Voisins» and discuss about it...

Here are some of the words collected:
 “Mirror”: there is a mirror in every bathroom, in front of every sink. This seems to be very important for Europeans. Back in the village there aren’t so mirrors everywhere.

“Marmite”: this is what brings people together, making food, sharing food. Les Grands Voisins is like a Marmite
 “Integration”: we lose our differences to become similar and equal

“Ennui” (“boredom”): there is nothing to do here on the weekends, there is lots of boredom

3. INITIATION WORKSHOPS : LEARNING ART AS A LANGUAGE

None of the participants had much experience with art. The challenge of the «initiation workshops» was to offer an invitation to taste different art forms so they see which one is for them. Because the main aim of all the initiation workshops was to give the participants some artistic tools in order to express themselves freely and clearly, we did not try to limit them by a specific subject or one path to take.

PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOP

WHAT DID WE FOCUS ON? WHAT WAS IMPORTANT?

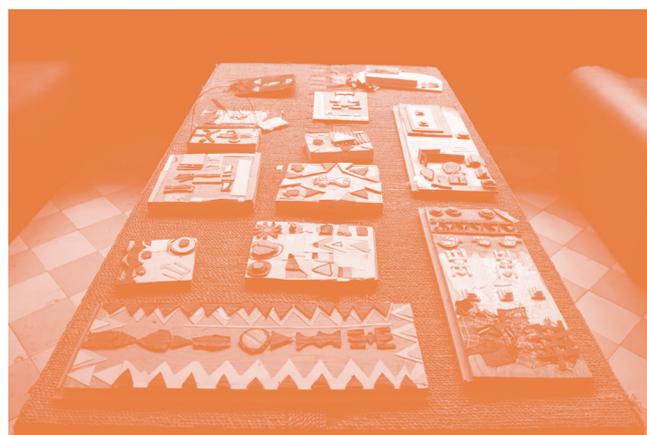


- Learn basics of composition
- Understand light
- See colours
- Imagine, test, use different frames
- Learn to use the body, pose

SCULPTURE WORKSHOP

WHAT DID WE FOCUS ON? WHAT WAS IMPORTANT?

- Expand the idea of what a sculpture is
- Learn to see shapes and colours
- use any material and integrate it in the sculpture, for example, some used some pieces of wood, others



used some leafs of tree and some used some pieces of cartoon papers

→ Valorise «African culture»: the artist leading the workshop and many participants were from Senegal, and we wished to valorize the Senegalese aesthetic as opposed to forcing a European approach to sculpture

THEATRE WORKSHOP

WHAT DID WE FOCUS ON? WHAT WAS IMPORTANT?

→ «Demechanising» the body: get liberated from the everyday routines and repeated movements to prepare for creativity

→ Help engagement by offering easy playful activities

→ Learn to present ideas with one's own body or the body of another

→ Start making commons scenes, in collaboration



COLLAGE WORKSHOP

WHAT DID WE FOCUS ON? WHAT WAS IMPORTANT?

→ «demechanising» the way we create images, introducing randomness and play

→ learning basics of composition

→ letting imagination run free

→ telling stories with images

→ talking about the art works created

For the description of some activities see chapter 3



NEWSPAPER WORKSHOP

WHAT DID WE FOCUS ON? WHAT WAS IMPORTANT?

→ Giving participants a chance to write or tell their story, the story they wish to tell.

→ Using the newspaper format to gather everyone's stories and images

During the «initiation workshops» we adopted some working principles to guide our work:



HORIZONTALITY AND CO-CONSTRUCTION

As much as possible we tried to invite participants to decision-making, to offer their opinions on the workshops and the joint work (e.g. «what art form would you like to learn?», «what form of expression do you imagine for your message?», «what is the most important for you?»). It was a slow learning process to become aware of our own cultural embeddedness, our schemas, and mechanisms, and also on the process of how such questions can be asked, when they start to make sense, when the others will feel empowered to answer. Our team tried as much as possible to work with a horizontal posture, integrating all team members in decisions, welcome the critique as a resource, and not question the feelings of residents when they questioned our work. We learnt how to let go of some desires when they did not meet those of the group. We tried not to think on behalf of someone else but rather think together. We tried to adjust to other, explore the position of a helper who is also helped in a mutual learning.

The constancy of workshop: we worked together from March 2017 until September 2017 in regular base, almost once a week.

Choosing a strategic location, where facilitators became guests, the «residents» the hosts: As we mentioned above, the «Maison des medecins» was the leisure centre at the disposal of residents. It was «their» space rather than the «workers». The facilitators' team

chose to hold the session there, rather than inviting residents into «our space».

Flexibility: We tried to be flexible with the time of workshops/subjects/activities in order to reach the participants in maximum way, that's why the team Artivism in Paris did not hesitate to organize many workshops during the weekends or holidays because it was suitable for participants

4. CAMPAIGN(S): GIVING AND RECEIVING A MESSAGE

1. EXHIBITION

On the 30th June an art exhibition was organized for the artists working on the site of «Les Grands Voisins» our activist workshop received a room in the exhibition where we exposed the art works already created: sculptures, photos and the texts. The complexity of a social experiment like les Grands Voisins is well illustrated by the reception of the texts written by the participants: many visitors were excited to read for the very first time the opinions expressed by residents. However, some people were overwhelmed by the sincerity of the texts, which shared positive but also negative thoughts, talked about disappointment, solitude, anonymity.



2. INTERACTIVE PARCOURS

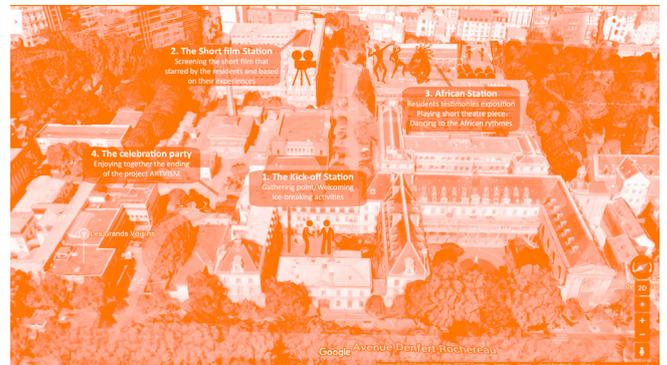
On the 28th July we invited people who work and live on the site for an activist afternoon together, presenting them different aspects of our workshops. We created a parcours across different spots of the GrandsVoisins, spaces that are more frequented by residents and spaces of the office dwellers.

We started our event in the courtyard of one of the main buildings for NGOs. We welcomed the audience and the participants in an informal setting with snacks and drinks to get to know each other in a casual atmosphere.

To facilitate the process we lead some ice-breaking activities, learning names and some aspects of our identities.

We invited participants to walk to the next station, walking together with 2 other persons they know the least, we asked them to discuss with each other about the first good memory in the site of Grands Voisins.

In our second station we screened the short film based on the text of the residents who were engaged with us, and starred by them. It's a 10 minutes short film. The film was introduced by the director *Ivan GONZALES* and one of the participants who contributed to the script and also was a main character. We exhibited the visual elements created: the texts, photos and collages. We performed a traditional



Senegalese tale about «the secret of happiness». We wanted to end the parcours with a celebration of the work we did during the last couples of months, we enjoyed together of some music, and we danced once again.





WHAT WE LIKED IN OUR CAMPAIGN

Each station worked, did what it was supposed to do, the combined energies of the participants (residents and the members, volunteers of the élan's team) worked nicely, the months dedicated to preparation and rehearsal bore their fruits.

WHAT WE SHOULD DO DIFFERENTLY

The turn-out wasn't quite like we expected. All the residents who participated in the activist workshops were present, but we had quite few participants from the office dwellers' side. Very few people came from the organisations leading LesGrandsVoisins, while they were key targets. Their presence would have confirmed the residents that they are listened to, their opinions matter. For this reason we decided to add another campaign event, connected to the publication of the journal, one of our main products.

3. PUBLICATION OF THE "JOURNAL"

Our final campaign event took place on the 27th of October. The event was dedicated to the presentation of the journal, reading some excerpts, organizing a space for exhibition and then celebrating together the work done.

As before, visitors reacted according to their sensibilities: some were happy and enthusiastic to learn about the views, experiences and opinions of residents that they have not heard before or not thought about before. Others, in particular social workers whose mission is most dedicated to the wellbeing of the residents were disappointed by the criticism that some residents formulated.



TO CONCLUDE : OUR FAVORITE ACHIEVEMENTS AND THE MISTAKES TO LEARN FROM

The activist tools served us well in being able to engage in discussions and reflection on issues that were important to the residents on our site.

Team members, who at the beginning showed resistance towards the arts, turned out to be the most engaged and most regular. They started to express themselves more and more, and learned to give form to their opinions with art. For time constraints and technical concerns, we did not try to involve participants in the post-production of visual products such as the paper and the post cards. We didn't make much effort to include everyone in the administrative management of the project either. This is a little bit of a regret : we could have benefited from doing this work together.

The process offered very exciting questions concerning the posture of the artist / facilitator, the possibilities and limits of horizontality and co-construction, and our "habits" and expectations concerning artistic quality and forms of expression. Indeed, we had to become aware of our own ethnocentric vision of what is art and what is protest, our desire of inviting everyone to follow the European conceptions of what art should be, and how we should communicate about issues in sophisticated artistic ways. How to make activism in intercultural ways, overcoming ethnocentrism?

Finally, we should give importance to the people who are in the position of making changes, make the transformations in the subject matters that are carried in our activist campaigns. In fairness, in some cases, the oppression is so blatant and done in a methodical, conscious way, that the only possible strategy is confrontation. But sometimes those who we may perceive agents of oppression, are potential actors for change, and possibly they are entangled in a web of power dynamics themselves. The advantage of our "small scale" project in Paris, focusing on our immediate surrounding is that these people in "power position" were accessible – at least in theory. Although we worked in open ways, inviting everyone to join in, we did not take all precautions to ensure that our message can be heard. Indeed, some of our "target public" did not have the resources necessary to overcome negative emotions that the mirror we offered may have triggered. We can still learn how to involve everyone in a creative dialogue that instead of rigid closure effectively promotes joint work for change.



FACE CACHÉE
LE SUPPLÉMENT

SANS LES
RÉSIDENTS
LES GRANDS
VOISINS
N'EXISTERAIENT
PAS

TRANSMISSION & TÉMOIGNAGES
DES RÉSIDENTS / 24 OCT. 2017

Cover of Face caché newspaper, Élan interculturel

Ma maladie m'a troublée, j'ai dû tout recommencer à zéro. C'est pour ça que je suis ici aujourd'hui. C'est là vie. Mais jusque-là, j'ai travaillé. J'ai travaillé. Je me bats comme je peux. J'espère. Je fais des petits boulots, quand je peux. Je loue à Euro Millions... Je tente ma chance parfois... Je bats une personne battante. Je me bats comme je peux. Donc ceux qui te regardent mal, moi et d'autres personnes, on n'a rien fait pour être là. C'est juste les circonstances de la vie et ça peut arriver à tout le monde.



La pauvreté ce n'est pas une maladie. La pauvreté c'est quelque chose qui arrive à tout le monde. Il faut qu'ils comprennent ça. Même ici, il y a certains visages que je regarde. Dès qu'ils te regardent, ils savent que tu habites ici. Tu n'auras même pas un bonjour. Si tu les saluez, ils ne te répondent même pas. Moi je ne salue plus personne ici. Quand je passe, je passe. Je ne salue personne. Tu es résidente à l'Horizon tu sers à quoi? Tu peux leur apporter quoi? Tu ne peux rien leur apporter! Donc, ils te simplifient. Ils te prennent comme une moins que rien, parce que tu résides à l'Horizon, tu résides aux Grands Voisins. Tu ne peux rien leur apporter. Parce qu'on regarde ta classe sociale, tes origines, ta couleur... Donc, c'est compliqué. Ils passent leur temps à faire la publicité des Grands Voisins, on dirait que c'est un nouveau monde.

Quand tu arrives aux Grands Voisins, tu as l'impression que c'est un truc touristique.

On devrait donner le bon exemple aux gens de dehors. Mais ce n'est pas ce que l'on voit. Quand tu arrives ici, tu as l'impression que c'est un truc touristique. Les touristes viennent et ça rapporte de l'argent. Et nous qui habitons ici, nous sommes juste là pour nous cacher. Pour ne pas nuire au marché. C'est un peu ça. C'est la publicité qu'ils font croire aux gens, le vivre ensemble. Mais moi cela ne me dérange pas, j'ai appris à vivre avec les gens. Demain, je pourrai continuer à vivre ma vie. Même si ce n'est pas ici.

Mais ce qui me fait mal, c'est que je passe mon été comme si j'étais en prison. Pourtant je suis dehors. Mais c'est comme ça la prison! Puisque tu vis la routine. Il n'y a rien qui est plus énervant que la routine!

Quand tu sens qu'à partir de 19 heures, tu vas rentrer dans ta chambre. Tu commences à faire les mêmes choses tous les jours. Franchement, c'est fatiguant. Ce sont mes enfants qui me donnent le courage de me lever le matin. Parfois, je me dis: si je meurs... Si je dors et que le jour le sommeil m'emporte. Peut-être que je ne vais plus vivre tout ça. Mais je me dis: si je meurs, mes enfants vont souffrir. Alors que Dieu me garde pour longtemps! C'est grâce à mes enfants que j'ai la force de me lever tous les jours, et de ne pas coucher tous les jours... C'est grâce à mes enfants. Sinon, vraiment... Ce n'est pas encourageant.

Ce n'est pas seulement le fait d'aider les gens. Quand on aide les gens, il faut nous mettre dans les bonnes conditions, de façon à ce que l'on soit reconnaissant. Mais ce n'est pas seulement le fait de donner du dors gratuit, tu demandes trop. Je sais qu'il y a des personnes qui vont m'entendre et dire: tu dors gratuit, tu demandes trop! Non, ce n'est pas ça! Quand on vous aide, il faut nous mettre dans les bonnes conditions. De façon, à ce que demain quand on ne sera plus là, on garde de bons souvenirs de cet endroit. C'est ça aider. Aider, ce n'est pas prendre les gens et les lancer là-bas à l'extérieur... Tu ne te retrouves pas! Tu ne te retrouves pas avec les Voisins... Tu ne te retrouves pas là où tu dors. Finalement, c'est deux prisons différentes. Quand tu sors à l'extérieur de ton centre, tu ne te retrouves pas avec les Voisins. Quand tu reviens où tu dors, tu ne te retrouves pas. Il n'y a rien du tout qui se passe, à part manger, dormir.

Tu ne te retrouves pas avec les Voisins...

Tu ne retrouves pas là où tu dors.

TRAVAIL

Récit d'un Résident de l'Horizon



Avant d'arriver ici, le 25 mars 2015, j'étais dans la rue. C'est une assistante sociale qui m'a aidé à entrer aux Grands Voisins. Avant ça, soit j'appelais le 115 pour dormir, soit je dormais dehors. Je suis resté trois mois dans la rue. Après, j'ai passé quarante jours sur l'avenue Montparnasse au Centre Catholique. C'est là que l'assistante sociale m'a aidé à avoir une place en foyer. Avant, je me débrouillais tout seul.

Je n'ai pas de travail stable. Je n'ai pas beaucoup d'argent. Je gagne un peu d'argent avec la vente de ça et ça... Qu'est-ce que je fais moi avec neuf cent euros sur mon compte? Je ne touche rien maintenant. Cela fait trois mois qu'il n'y a plus de travail dans mon domaine. Je vais pouvoir faire un nouveau dossier pour le RSA à la fin de ce mois, mais je vais devoir attendre encore un mois avant de recevoir l'argent. Si je n'avais pas l'argent de mes petites ventes, comment je ferais pour acheter mon tabac et ma bière? C'est impossible, même pour acheter des produits d'hygiène. Le shampoing, c'est impossible. Je me demande ce que font les assistantes sociales du site.

Si je n'avais pas l'argent de mes petites ventes, comment je ferais pour acheter mon tabac et ma bière? C'est impossible, même pour acheter des produits d'hygiène.

Le shampoing, c'est impossible.

Quand je suis arrivé ici, je travaillais comme bénévole pour une des grandes associations du site. J'ai fait de la maçonnerie, de la charpenterie.

Et si les gens qui habitent ici, ils ne sont pas embauchés, ils ne peuvent pas sortir de la merde!

J'aidais au bar et au barbecue. J'ai travaillé dans ce qui est la Lingerie aujourd'hui. Comme je n'avais rien à faire, j'ai essayé d'apprendre le français. Je me suis inscrit au cours mais le lieu a fermé.

Quand cette association nous a parlé d'embaucher quelqu'un, leur ai dit que j'étais disponible. Mais qu'est-ce qu'ils ont fait? Ils ont pris une personne de l'extérieur. Ils te disent: Ha! Mais on ne peut pas l'embaucher, tu habites ici! Et si les gens qui habitent ici, ils ne sont pas embauchés, ils ne peuvent pas sortir de la merde! Alors, j'ai décidé d'arrêter de travailler avec eux. Avant je faisais beaucoup de choses, soit dans l'atelier, soit dans la cuisine. Mais j'ai tout arrêté. Les tables, les chaises que j'ai faites... J'ai tout arrêté!

Si tu as besoin d'un peu d'argent pour acheter quoi que ce soit, ils ne t'en donnent jamais. La seule chose qu'ils te donnent c'est de la nourriture. A ce moment-là, il y avait déjà la Monnaie-Temps mais je ne la recevais pas tout le temps. Et je ne pouvais rien acheter avec! Je me demandais: qu'est-ce que je vais bien pouvoir faire avec? Acheter des vêtements et des bicyclettes tous les jours? A l'époque, il n'y avait pas encore le Trocshop ou Food de Rue.

Tu ne dépenses pas tous les jours une heure de vêtements... Quand tu es sur un site où tu n'as même pas de quoi ranger tes vêtements! Tu ne vas pas l'acheter des vêtements alors que tu as un tout petit cabi. Qu'est-ce que tu vas faire? Tu peux mettre trois chemises et deux pulls.

