

memory, object, talent

Art and Design for Social and Cultural Inclusion of Immigrants

This poster is based on a hybrid art and design participatory project with migrant and refugee communities that recently took place in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, US. We begin by defining the practice in question in relation to how the collaboration with participants takes place, the systematized way in which this type of projects are developed, as well as the fact that it is a means of promoting equality among citizens and the social and cultural sustainability of society.

Following is a description of the methodology used for the interaction with the participants, namely the creation of a specific game called MOT, which is a form of self-representation and valorization of the engaged migrant and refugee communities.

Keywords: Migration, Community, Social Innovation, Participation, Transdisciplinarity, Game.

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* The team that created the project, and guided the participants in the workshops was composed by us and Jane Gilmer.



1. community, creativity, participation

Our transdisciplinary practice explores different kinds of knowledge and methodologies to create alternative ways of representation and social innovation, namely a community-based art and design model that promotes the social and cultural sustainability of society through concrete actions with citizens. Artists and designers in this field are creative agents that trigger participatory actions for the co-creation of objects, spaces or events with certain socio-cultural objectives in mind.



7. game-sculpture self-representation

The experienced participatory practice is characterized by the use of different approaches and means of expression, such as the implementation of a set of relational principles and techniques, methods and strategies of education, as well as the use of sculpture as a means of expression and interaction. The use of photography and video to document the activities, and constitute an image archive, is also a central medium that allows a systematic communication with other audiences. Finally, the use of installation and happening, is another step for the community self-representation and for the public participation.



11. community self-representation

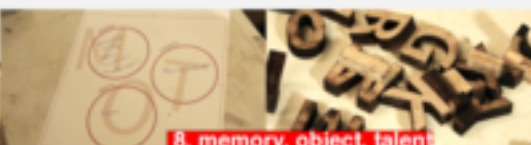
Game has a specific and autonomous condition apart from the player's conscience, the latter not being the subject of the game. However, it is through those who play that the game acquires the quality of representation (Gadamer 1999). In our project, we highlight the players willingness to participate in the game and align themselves with the established rules. The moment in which the player takes the option to play according to his state of mind, reveals the freedom in the act of going to the game, knowing that later on he or she will have to condition himself to the game dynamics (Gadamer, 1999).



2. co-creation through democratic individualism

By comparing participatory art and design with improvised jazz, it is possible to see how the collaboration between participants is established. Just as in jazz, where improvisation overlaps composition, a participatory project incorporates the participants' contributions in a context previously planned by the artist or designer. Berys Gaut (2002) mentions that this is a model of democratic individualism, in which a group of strong musical personalities dialogues among themselves, creating music with a quality they wouldn't be able to play alone.

A community artistic collaboration and the inherent systematization of processes is understood by us as a mechanism to generate the growth of creativity existing in the individual and the community, aiming the regulation of the creativity capital. Through the co-creation of objects, spaces or events, we hope to contribute to the promotion of equality and thus to the sustainable development of society. On Donella Meadows's (2009) view, this systematization is called a return and reinforcement circuit, with the aim of increasing the flow of capital into the system beyond the existing one. In this way, we believe that the mechanism in question stimulates the resilience of each social group with regard to the capital of creativity. Taking into account that the existing creativity in the individual or in the community may be inactive, the artistic collaboration works as a specific impulse whose objective is to rehabilitate a system that may be disrupted.



8. memory, object, talent

The first part was based on the idea of a specific game, namely the MOT challenge (acronym for Memory, Object and Talent), in which each participant would have to share a personal experience. After the identification of the self-memory, object and talent, in the way that this relationship could mean the expression of each participant's individual freedom, reliefs in clay were made. In this phase the main ideas were synthesized through the combination of words, images and textures. The final objective was the creation of clay sculptures.



12. playing beyond themselves

The logic that characterizes the game is not that of achieving goals at each move, but rather that of a permanent self-representation, which defines the one who participates in the game and fulfills his function. Within the Shifting Ground playful nature the main question is the continuous action of representing the vulnerable and unfair condition of creative citizens, with their own culture, needing a more inclusive society. At the same time, reference is made to the fact that those who play refer beyond themselves, involving those who watch, and not just a simple representation for those who are present (Gadamer, 1999).



3. conducting participatory projects

As conductors of a participatory project, we seek to keep participants in the course of the outlined activities so that they autonomously go ahead exploring knowledge, sometimes being diverted from the initial objective to meet other results. It is a way of promoting equality, in which artists and designers have a role as conductors. This is an absolutely necessary quality for social sustainability which needs agents for its promotion and permanent confirmation (Rancière 2002).



The joint action of citizens with artists and designers, through the development of participatory artistic initiatives, is a political option of everyday life that determines how citizens organize their way of life and affect society. A society with a more participatory culture and focused on its own innovation is more democratic, creative and, as such, more cohesive and sustainable (Manzini 2019).



9. the experience lived through art

Gadamer (1999) states that in the context of a game the role of the player is analogous to other possibilities for the production of subjectivity. Game and player are two linked entities, but with their own meaning. Understanding the core of the game does not come from the player subjective thinking, but through the way of being of the game itself. And this is comparable to the nature of art, which is not in the aesthetic consciousness, but in the experience lived through art, whose transforming capacity of the subject is the true being of the art object.



13. conclusion

The Shifting Ground project is a demonstration of creativity of newcomer Hispanic and African immigrants and refugees to Cedar Rapids, while revealing a new paradigm of relationship and collaboration with the local community. The initiative is based on the systematization of processes to leverage the participants latent creativity. The idea of the MOT game was adopted as a strategy for the self-representation of the vulnerable citizens in question and to promote intersubjectivity around the need to find sustainable solutions.