

CREATIVE ARTS, MIGRATION, AND ADVOCACY

The arts and creative practices can influence opinions and policies. Their transformative powers can help rendering the invisible visible and the unfamiliar familiar (and vice versa). There are many ways for organising and conducting a creative, participatory project to explore, analyse, and advocate on issues pertaining to migration and asylum. The terms themselves (e.g. participation, creation, advocacy) will mean different things to the wide range of potential actors involved.

This toolkit offers some lines of thought and enquiry rather than professing to provide a prescriptive, step-by-step guide and checklist. Although one may learn lessons from how other projects have unravelled, each setting is obviously different.

**COLLABORATING WITH
DIVERSE ORGANISATIONS
AND ACTORS**

**ENSURING MEANINGFUL
PARTICIPATION**

**CREATIVE PROCESSES
AND RE/PRESENTATIONS**

**ADVOCACY: SHARING,
REACHING OTHERS, AND
EFFECTING CHANGE**

COLLABORATING WITH DIVERSE ORGANISATIONS AND ACTORS

CHALLENGES

Harnessing the frictions that emerge when collaborating with diverse actors (e.g. NGO practitioners, artists, curators, migrant leaders, officials, researchers, activists etc) with varied visions and interests. Can you find common ground and sustain agreement?

Defining terms amongst people with different understandings (e.g. differences based on religious, disciplinary, professional background etc). Can you agree on a common language?

Working collaboratively across geographical distances to meet tight deadlines. How can you collaborate fully from the start?

Identifying your own privileges and positions of power. What are the implications of biases and assumed hierarchies?

COLLABORATING WITH DIVERSE ORGANISATIONS AND ACTORS

APPROACHES

Critically reflect on and discuss the individual and organisational motivations for collaboration.

Identify effective egalitarian ways of sharing tasks, whilst respecting one another's diverse expertise and networks.

Explore the possibilities of combining cross-sector and interdisciplinary funding streams.

Prioritise collective recognition over individualistic appropriation.

Seek to understand pre-existing relationships amongst potential project partners.

ENSURING MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

CHALLENGES

Motivating people to participate in the project. Why should people take part?

Finding a balance between drawing on a circle of known and committed participants and engaging other motivated people. Can you identify and address barriers to participation (e.g. costs)?

Bringing together amateurs and professionals in a creative project. Can you help unleash people's potentials without being patronising?

Reflecting on the kind of participation deployed through the project. How involved will the participants really be (e.g. in decision-making)?

Ensuring the participatory focus does not conceal elements of exploitation. Who benefits from the involvement of participants?

Recognising that power differentials amongst those involved in the project will not disappear despite efforts at minimising and flattening hierarchies. Can we creatively engage with those hierarchies?

Establishing long-term relationships based on mutual trust, solidarity and respect. What are the moral implications of such relationships?

ENSURING MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

APPROACHES

Ensure that migrants/refugees are able to get involved in the project, but also to refuse to take part or to withdraw.

Reach potential participants through multiple stakeholders in the field.

Bring together people from diverse horizons and ideas.

Foster enthusiasm without making promises you cannot keep.

Make clear what (support) participants can expect from the project.

Discuss (and amend) the project's methods and objectives with the participants.

Tackle issues of confidentiality, harm and anonymity with participants without deciding for them whether their identities should be hidden or exposed.

Treat participants as experts of their own experiences and stories (e.g. without imposing topics or subjects).

Draw on (and add to) participants' range of (creative) skills as part of the process.

Encourage active participation and active listening amongst all.

Ask questions of participants but do not feel that you are owed responses (or gratitude).

Accept that the project may not lead to the intended outcomes.

CREATIVE PROCESSES AND RE/PRESENTATIONS

CHALLENGES

Countering existing, dominant (and often negative) representations (e.g. un/productive migrant or refugee). Can you find ways for (self)representations that challenge stereotypes rather than reproducing them?

Building a genuinely safe place and establishing relationships based on trust and solidarity take time. How to ensure everyone can exchange with one another in a sincere way?

Involving the participants without reducing them to one issue or story. How to engage with participants' full range of experiences without claiming to represent them wholesale?

Dealing with legal and political constraints to the creative process. How to challenge or circumvent barriers to freedom of expression (e.g. access to public space for a performance)?

Engaging a range of people from different background entails practical challenges. How do you communicate across languages?

Keeping the audience in mind throughout the creative process. Who do you want to reach (and where, how etc)?

CREATIVE PROCESSES AND RE/PRESENTATIONS

APPROACHES

Discuss the overall issues and specific context as part of the creative process.

Write and create together.

Make use of what you have: expensive equipment is not always essential (e.g. mobile phones rather than cameras).

Plan, but give space to the unexpected in the creative process.

Listen to one another and get to know each other from the start of the creative process.

Explore agreements and disagreements as powerful and challenging vehicles of creation.

Consider how the non-verbal can be a practical and powerful way of working together and emotionally reaching an audience.

Draw on individual memories and experiences to build a collective creation.

Make space for difficult stories as part of the creative process (but not necessarily as a starting point).

Resist homogeneity and seek to include multiple views and stories.

Use creative mediums that appeal to participants and the public alike.

Involve spectators in the creation/performance/exhibition (e.g. on the street, forum theatre).

Ensure there are clear arrangements and informed agreement over the intellectual property of the creations and any potential revenue: people own their stories and creations.

ADVOCACY: SHARING, REACHING OTHERS, AND EFFECTING CHANGE

CHALLENGES

Reflecting on the diverse meanings advocacy can take (especially amongst the people involved). Advocacy for whom and to what ends?

Managing the tension between aesthetic and political concerns amongst various actors: How do you resolve issues over content and form whilst creatively engaging with politically sensitive issues?

Adapting the language when creatively engaging with the issues at stake to reach a wider audience. Are you making it more accessible, oversimplifying, or dumbing it down?

Finding a balance between engaging with participants' particular experiences and a more general situation. Will you articulate fictional examples and/or specific, recognisable events?

Identifying the intended audience. Can the project address policy makers and/or the immediate communities where participants live?

Developing a project involving and reaching beyond familiar networks of supporters. Can the creation engage people who are unsympathetic or even hostile (as participants and/or spectators)?

Controlling how the creations will be received, welcome and re-used is not possible. Can you put appropriate safeguards in place?

Avoiding judging and morally prescriptive messages. Can you prompt people to reflect on their beliefs and views?

Examining wider issues in society through the exploration of migration/asylum issues. Can you engage with broader topics without abusing those stories?

Thinking about the legacy and aftermath for the project but also for the participants. Did the project bring them additional tools, opportunities, contacts, and/or skills?

ADVOCACY: SHARING, REACHING OTHERS, AND EFFECTING CHANGE

APPROACHES

Have realistic expectations and clear goals (at least to start with).

Consider building links between the creative project and traditional advocacy practices (e.g. by joining or launching a campaign on the issues explored creatively).

Reflect on the terms you use and their potential pitfalls (e.g. languages of victimhood, hospitality etc).

Find ways to break away from conventional and expected usages of 'testimonials'

Use humour and contrasts.

Understand the divisions (and diverging views) amongst the people you 'represent'.

Think about the potential audience(s) from the start of the creative process (e.g. are you going to approach secondary schools or a museum of contemporary arts?).

Create safe and convivial spaces to generate engagement amongst the audience(s).

Foster direct interactions between participants, creations and spectators (e.g. during an exhibition launch etc).

Seek new potential collaborations during the performance/display of creative artefacts.

These reflections over potential challenges and possible approaches stem from “Arts for Advocacy” workshops held in Glasgow (as part of Refugee Festival Scotland 2017) and Rabat (as part of Migrant’Scène 2017), during which artists, migrant leaders, researchers, NGO practitioners, curators and others met to discuss challenges and ways forward in creative engagement on displacement. In a multi-lingual setting, they shared their diverse experiences, presented their own work, and attended the exhibitions of our project’s creative outputs. This is a partial synthesis of those discussions intended to stimulate further critical (self)reflection rather than a definitive guide.

Arts for Advocacy: Creative Engagement with Forced Displacement in Morocco

www.artsforadvocacy.org