

REPAIR THE LAND:

Tools from the Art World for the Future

ART LIVING LAB TO REPAIR THE LAND

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for the Future

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The publication *REPAIR THE LAND: Tools from the Art World for the Future* is part of the Art Living Lab to Repair the Land (ALILAND) project.

ALILAND deploys three projects on damaged territories: Energy Aftermath in Barruelo de Santullán (Spain), Agriculture Aftermath in Wietstock (Germany), and Electricity Aftermath in Šibenik (Croatia).

ART LIVING LAB TO REPAIR THE LAND

More info: www.artlivinglab.eu

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Introductory Note

Petra Šarin, Co-Editor

The international European project *Art Living Lab to Repair the Land* (ALILAND) explored the concept of the "ruins of modernity"[1] by addressing territories degraded through extractive and industrial economic activities. The two-year-long project focused on the regeneration and repair of landscapes that have been abandoned following the decline of their economic profitability, leaving enduring environmental, social and cultural consequences for local communities. Through three European case studies, the project examined distinct yet interconnected environmental challenges. These encompassed the impacts of coal extraction in Barruelo de Santullán, Spain; the high energy demands of industrial food production in Wietstock, Germany; and the legacy of electricity-intensive industrial activities in Šibenik, Croatia.

ALILAND employed Art Living Lab methodologies and participatory art practices based on *The New Patrons Protocol* developed by François Hers.[2] Launched in 2023, Art Living Lab serves as an umbrella framework that unites a range of projects through a common methodology centred on themes essential to environmental sustainability and planetary conservation.[3] The second edition of the Living Lab brought together three project partners (in alphabetical order): the Association for Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Research from Croatia, Concomitentes from Spain, and Kunstverein Rügen e.V. from Germany. Through three participatory processes grounded in the Living Lab and New Patrons methodologies, citizens were invited to explore their aspirations, confront shared concerns, and collectively envision the future of their neighbourhoods and local environments. A central question guiding these processes was: How can participatory art contribute to such forms of anticipation?

1 Crocker, Robert, Chiveralls, Keri (eds.). *Subverting Consumerism. Reuse in an Accelerated World*. London: Routledge, 2018.
2 Hers, François. *The New Patrons Protocol*. Paris: Fondation de France, 1990.
3 Art Living Lab. "What Do We Do?" *Art Living Lab*, n.d. 2026. https://artlivinglab.eu/info/what-we-do (date of access 1 June 2026).

The book comprises eight contributions organised into three thematic sections. In the introductory chapter "Reanimating Land: Working with Critical Care", **Elke Krasny** develops a framework for understanding land as an entity inseparable from human and more-than-human existence. Drawing on feminist theories of care, Indigenous epistemologies, environmental humanities, and critical land studies, the chapter analyses the historical and ongoing violence inflicted upon land through extraction, dispossession, industrialisation, and geopolitical conflict. Krasny introduces the concept of *land care* as both an analytical and a practical response to these conditions. Ultimately, the text advocates for practices of care capable of restoring land's life-making capacities and sustaining more just and regenerative futures.

The core section of this publication brings together contributions from the project mediators, who reflect on the participatory processes developed within the three Living Labs. Drawing on their experiences in territories profoundly shaped by extractive and industrial activities, the authors examine how participatory art practices can engage with the environmental, social, and cultural legacies of these sites while contributing to broader processes of territorial repair and regeneration. Presented by **Susanne Burmester** (Germany), **Alfredo Escapa Presa** (Spain), and **Sonja Leboš** (Croatia), these practice-based contributions take the form of case studies that introduce the specific historical, ecological, and socio-political contexts of each site. They further explore the methodologies, challenges, and forms of collaboration that emerged through the Living Labs, highlighting ways of working within conditions marked by ongoing environmental degradation, social transformation, and, in some cases, long-term neglect.

The final section reflects on the wider context of each country, intersecting the methodologies of the New Patrons and practices of participatory art, micropolitics and decision-making policies, thereby enhancing the hands-on experiences. Through both theoretical inquiry and practical experience, the authors examine how participatory cultural practices can foster collective agency and civic engagement. This section features contributions by **Alexander Koch** (Germany), **Kristina Leko** (Croatia), and **Fran Quiroga** (Spain).

In afterword, the co-editor **Sonja Leboš** reflects on the project's central thematic axes. Her contribution further analyses the proposals for artworks (presented in this book in the form of artistic dossiers) commissioned within the framework of the project. Situating these works within broader debates on political and feminist ecologies, as well as the right to the city, she examines their potential to generate new forms of collective engagement with environmental and social challenges. In doing so, her contribution returns to and further elaborates the notion of ecologies of care introduced in Elke Krasny's opening chapter, bringing the volume's key themes into a productive dialogue.

01

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Elke Krasny

Reanimating Land: Working with Critical Care

Elke Krasny

At this crucial historical juncture, land demands renewed thinking, unwavering attention, urgent care, and decisive action. It stands as a site of acute geopolitical assault, imperial imposition, and strategic resource manoeuvring. Throughout the twenty-first century, it has become an unmistakable fact that Man has emerged as a geological force, violently inscribing power onto land and causing large-scale and lasting damage. Land is both anthropogenic heritage, received from the past and held as a responsibility in the present, and a legacy, shaped today, for those who will live through the changing conditions of land in possible or impossible futures. This complex relationship, decisive for the conditions of life on planet Earth, between anthropogenic heritage and legacy, can be apprehended otherwise and translated into new forms of practice when approached through critical land and earth thinking.[1] These approaches cultivate an understanding of the land as interdependent with life, supporting attentive, humble, and slow-moving practices of learning, stewardship, and care. Land care within socially and ecologically engaged grassroots movements, community organising, and artistic practices across urban and rural contexts, serves to foreground material agencies, relational ecologies, and the situated capacities of land itself.

Land cares, the plurality of practices devoted to caring for the land, articulate a powerful politics of refusal towards the masculinist hubris of

1 There is now a substantial body of critical land and earth thinking across multiple disciplines and traditions, including ecology, conservation, feminist Marxism, Indigenous epistemologies, pedagogy, and scholar-activism. Seminal contributions include, among others, Aldo Leopold's land ethic articulated in *A Sand County Almanac* (1949); Silvia Federici's analysis of the transition from feudalism to capitalism and the enclosure of common land in *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004), based on research initiated in the context of feminist organizing in the 1970s and first published in Italian in 1984; Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (2013), which brings Indigenous and Western knowledge systems into dialogue; Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's 2014 article "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation" focuses on land-based education through reciprocal relationships with land. More recently, Saturnino M. Borras Jr. and Jennifer C. Franco's *Essential Concepts of Land Politics* (2025) assembles key terms concerned with land politics — from access, degradation, and dispossession to wasteland — from which, notably, care is absent.

technofix approaches to land and climate.[2] Land care challenges patriarchal imaginaries that frame domination over land as natural, inevitable, or desirable, exposing how such frameworks normalise control, exploitation, and hierarchical relations with the environment. Such approaches — including large-scale technological, geoengineering, or industrial interventions[3] — seek to mitigate environmental crises without confronting entrenched economic models, systemic inequalities, or unsustainable consumption patterns. These approaches frequently entail serious and sometimes unforeseen risks, including land-use conflicts, biodiversity loss, and new forms of extractive or coercive violence. By exposing these dangers, these land care formations insist on alternatives grounded in ethical responsibility, ecological attentiveness, and long-term relational thinking. They challenge the allure of quick fixes and technocratic solutions, emphasising instead deliberate, place-based, and socially embedded practices capable of sustaining both ecological and human communities over time, while fostering care, reciprocity, and intergenerational responsibility.

Given the convergence of historical forces violating land — brutal epistemologies of property, extraction and depletion economies, territorial and nationalist ideologies, warfare, the continued ruination and destruction, along with the accelerating land squeeze under capitalist and authoritarian regimes — this text mobilises "critical care"[4] as a lens through which to rethink and reanimate land. This is precisely because care is essential to the conditions of collective survival, a survival that is inextricably bound to, and interdependent with, the vitality of the land itself. The concept of critical care frames a new perspective at the intersection of three strands: the medical practice of sustaining life in crisis, the Frankfurt School inspired critical theory for analysing domination and imagining emancipation, and feminist critiques of care as undervalued labour and knowledge.

When considering that the aim of critical care is life-making, saving lives, and thus the reanimation of the vitality of land, this involves refusing and resisting the brutal hegemonic grammar of land by learning to understand the needs of land itself and the changing care needs articulated by land over time. This occurs as the changing historical processes of Earth's living and constructed surfaces — its mountains, deserts, and rocks — as well as all the land profoundly transformed by human infrastructures and settlements.

2 See: Grusin, *Anthropocene Feminism*; Tsing *et. al.*, *Feral Atlas*.
3 Buck, *After Geoengineering: Climate Tragedy, Repair, and Restoration*.
4 Fitz, Krasny, *Critical Care*.

Reanimation means to bring back to life or to restore vitality. We use the broad term reanimation here to include restoration, rehabilitation, regeneration and reanimation, and to go beyond these terms by foregrounding the liveliness and relational vitality of land and its ecosystems. Drawing on the Latin word 'anima' meaning life, spirit, and breath, reanimation thus refers to giving life and breath to something again, acknowledging the interconnection between the human and the more-than-human worlds. Reanimation describes an epistemic and material practice that disrupts extractivist ontologies by restoring land's status as an active, living participant in social, ecological, and historical relations. Thus, it involves negotiating the conflicts between the intrinsic needs of the land and of human inhabitation; conflicts arising not from necessity, but from ways of inhabiting that harm rather than honouring it. Land includes its vital skin – its soil – the thin, complex layer through which matter, energy, and life circulate, sustaining ecosystems, mediating biogeochemical processes, and holding the generative potential for all life forms. While all soil is land, not all land is soil; yet every portion of land participates in the Earth's web of relations, a web in which human survival, well-being, and ethical responsibility are inseparable from the care and flourishing of more-than-human worlds.

Land, and soil, are not only at the centre of anthropogenic domination, capitalist extraction and ideological appropriation, but also at the heart of the "complex, life-sustaining web"[5] of land cares and of cultural, epistemic, and spiritual relations to land. In the face of historical and present-day violence against land, its wounding, ruination, and death, this text conceives of land as living and proposes that land can be reanimated. This is not solely understood in material terms as restoration or forms of ecological repair, but crucially in cultural, epistemological, and spiritual terms, so land can be fully recognised as animate again, as a living and active entity. This text thus links the concept of critical care practised in multiple forms of material and immaterial land cares to a dual understanding of land rights. These are both legally or socially recognised enforceable entitlements held by individuals, groups, or states to use, manage, own, control, and transfer land, and of course its resources, and as proposed here, the living land's own undeniable right to exist, flourish, and demand respect for its vitality and rhythms. Land rights lie at the heart of struggles for justice among dispossessed, declassed, subaltern, previously colonised, and Indigenous populations, reflecting not only enforceable claims over territory and resources but also a recognition that the land itself – like the right of nature – holds an inherent entitlement

5 Fisher, Tronto, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring", 40.

to exist, thrive, and be part of shaping the terms of its own care. Land rights and the rights of land are thus rights to care.

The first section explains that reanimating land has to begin from the profound understanding that humans are land-bound beings, as human existence is inseparable from the land; we rely on it for sustenance, shelter, and life itself, and that land is an integral and active part of the history shared between humans and land. The second section then turns to the hegemonic history of Man-made violence against land. Violence against land is ultimately violence against human beings, foregrounding both our dependence on land and the ways human actions – past and present – have inflicted harm upon it. The analytical framework of the "necropolitics"[6] of land is introduced to argue that violent spatial management transforms land into a site of death-worlds and that land stores and remembers such violence. The third and concluding part then turns to the rights of land as the rights to care. It places critical care at the centre of reanimating land, insisting that knowing the violent histories of land, which are stored in the soil, in the asphalt, in the wetlands, in the fields is as crucial to practices of care, at once material and immaterial, as are other epistemologies and cosmologies of land foregrounding the literal and spiritual interconnectedness of land and humans. Caring for different futures of land requires knowing and understanding what land needs in response to the harm and damage caused by violence embedded in the ground itself. At the same time, imagining land cares for futurity through land rights draws inspiration from historical cosmologies and epistemologies that have related to land in ways outside regimes of extraction, domination, and mastery.

Land-Bound Beings

Rethinking land in this way starts by rethinking the human: not as a powerful knower and detached observer, but as an embodied and land-bound being. Like most living organisms, human beings are inseparable from and dependent upon land and its ecologies. We are born of it, sustained by it, and ultimately return to it. Land shapes all land-bound beings and sustains them. Land thus carries histories, cycles, and processes of all land-bound beings, including those of human beings. Our human bodies, cultures, economies, and imaginaries are formed through continuous entanglement

6 Achille Mbembe introduced the term *necropolitics* in a 2003 essay in the journal Public Culture. It was later expanded into a 2016 book *Necropolitics*, published in French, and translated into English in 2019.

with land across generations and epochs; our physiologies bear its minerals, our languages its metaphors, our political orders its boundaries, and more importantly, our histories its scars. To speak of humanity, therefore, is always already to speak of land: of grounding and living, cultivation and extraction, care and exploitation, belonging and dispossession. How humans inhabit land, at the same time, land inhabits not only humans and their bodies, but the bodies of all land-bound creatures. Any inquiry into how we relate to land as humans must begin from this elementary yet often obscured fact of fundamental material, bodily, and existential dependence on land for sustenance and habitation, and ultimately, for survival. This dependence precedes every ideology, underlies every social formation, and exceeds any single historical configuration. The terror of human exceptionalism and the hubris of anthropocentrism with their claim to "mastery"[7] over land, have severed the ties between human care and land care as mutually constitutive, while simultaneously legitimising Man's domination — that is, his mastery — of the land.

While land can take on many different meanings — territory under sovereign jurisdiction, property subject to ownership and regulation, a resource for extraction and accumulation, a basis of livelihood and social reproduction, and a material condition of ecological interdependence — we start by thinking of land here in the most general sense possible when we consider human beings and their land-bound existence. We think of all the surface of the earth, which is land. Roughly one third of planet Earth is made up of land — approximately 149.43 million km² of soils, rocks, forests, deserts, mountains, and plains. This vast surface is not merely a backdrop for land-bound life, including terrestrial organisms such as animals, plants, microbes, and humans, who live, sustain themselves, thrive, and reproduce primarily on solid ground rather than in aquatic environments. Land is not a passive stage

7 Feminist philosophy has fundamentally challenged both the Christian doctrine of the eternal soul and the secular colonial patriarchal Enlightenment ideas of reason, which both converged in the idea of Man's exceptionalism. Seminal works include Val Plumwood's 1993 *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* and Rosi Braidotti's 2013 *The Posthuman* as well as the 2021 *Posthuman Feminism*. Diana Coole's and Samantha Frost's 2010 edited volume *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* brings together a range of authors including Sara Ahmed, Jane Bennett, and Elizabeth Grosz, who address embodied humans as part of the material environment they produce and reproduce. In this text I follow the proposition of Anna Tsing in her 2016 essay "Earth Stalked by Man" to mark the figure of Man through capitalization. Man is a very specific historical figure, namely Enlightenment-Man and capitalization marks His relentless domination over nature, life, and the planet as a whole. The capitalization of Man differentiates this specific position of political and economic monoculture and domination from the diverse and multiple ways of existence of human beings.

upon which life unfolds; it is the very condition of the possibility of human existence and human activity, always already mediated by relations of power, care, labour, and violence. It provides the material substrate for habitation, nourishment, movement, labour, and social organisation, shaping the spatial and temporal horizons within which life becomes livable — or, under conditions of dispossession, precarious and unevenly sustained.

Humans, being land-bound, have written their history through land. By this, we do not mean solely that we can trace the history of land through colonial, dispossessive, and extractive projects — those long-standing efforts to reduce land to mere surface, resource, space, or blank slate. Nor is it only a matter of examining how land has been divided, governed by borders, or territorialised, or how archival records reveal the ways capitalist systems of ownership have transformed the mastery and valuation of land. Land itself functions as a material archive. It records the consequences of human activity, including the ways we produce, reproduce, and consume the land. In this sense, land is not only the history of nation-state territories or the chronology of ownership. It also stores, over time, the deeper histories of care and stewardship alongside histories of violence, wounding, and damage. Land's layers, scars, sediments, toxicities, infrastructures, absences, and ecologies are then land records, material archives of past actions, relations, and violences. Soils actively remember extraction and cultivation; forests remember clear-cutting and monoculture; urban ground remembers displacement, enclosure, burial, and construction.

History is thus not external to land, but internal. At the same time, the history of land is not external to humans, but stored inside their embodied existence. Against the diagnosis of "hyper-separation"[8] between humans and nature, and consequently humans and land, the concept of *"cuerpo-territorio"*[9] is most relevant to understand how the body and the land are bound up with each other, inseparable. Through this concept, we can understand that violence against land is simultaneously a violation of the bodies of humans

8 Val Plumwood has elaborated on hyper-separation between humans and nature, and consequently land, in "Dualism: the Logic of Colonization", a chapter of her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (pp. 41-68). Plumwood further expands on this diagnosis of hyper-separation in her 2002 book *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*.

9 Lorena Cabnal, territorial community feminist, introduced the idea of *cuerpo-territorio*. See: Cabnal, "Acercamiento a la construcción de la propuesta de pensamiento epistémico de las mujeres indígenas feministas comunitarias de Abya Yala". *Cuerpo-territorio* is a concept that derives from resistance, struggles, and lifeworlds in Abya Yala. It understands the body as the first territory of resistance and connects violence against women's bodies with violence against land, emphasizing that defending one's body, autonomy, and identity is inseparable from defending the territory, its community and its culture.

and more-than-human beings living there. At the same time, this concept allows us to understand that care for land is care for the bodies of all beings living there. What is done to the land is done to the bodies of those who live there. The land and the bodies are the material realities recording the archive of violence and of care. Rethinking land in this way is crucial for reanimating land. It means learning to understand the consequences of care for the land as well as the consequences of violence against the land.

Violence Against Land

At the time of writing, in early 2026, land is in the crosshairs. Land is increasingly singled out as a target of military force, extractive industry, state power, and speculative capital, and exposed to deliberate acts of seizure, control, and transformation. Geopolitics is entering a phase of renewed global brutality and runaway territorialisation, as unchecked logics of enclosure govern struggles over access to, and domination of, land. At the beginning of 2026, news cycles are saturated with land talk: a president of one country brazenly announcing that they will "run"[10] another, while proclaiming that their nation "needs to own"[11] yet another territory to deter rival superpowers — revealing how conquest, possession, and sovereignty are once again spoken aloud as ordinary instruments of policy, in a world drifting rapidly toward normalised imperial imagination politics.

Such statements revive colonial grammars of possession and imperial postures of mastery, exposing how territorial domination continues to be framed as necessity, security, and inevitability rather than as violence, theft, and the erosion of collective futures. What appears as rhetoric is, in fact, a declaration of intent: a reauthorisation of conquest as policy and of dispossession as common sense, normalising a world in which land is perpetually available for capture, unbounded extraction, strategic manipulation, and unending geopolitical exploitation. This argument rests on the claim that political events are land events — events that mark, and very often scar, wound, or deplete the land, becoming etched into its long-term material existence and thus its history and memory.

While land is acutely under attack, it is important to see how violence against land — and thus planet Earth as a whole — and vulnerability are structurally embedded across land and life, in fact endangering the very conditions for

10 Kurmanaev, Pager, "Maduro Arrives in N.Y."
11 Reuters, "Trump says the US needs to own Greenland to deter Russia, China".

the capacities of social and ecological reproduction. We understand such violence against land, at once geopolitical and geological, epistemic and material, as the *necropolitics* of land. The politics of death is expressed "in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die".[12] These politics are not only a diagnostic tool to critically analyse Man's supremacy in relation to other humans, but also in relation to land. War, extraction, and pollution act as the death-making of land. Land is targeted by this production of "death worlds",[13] the consequence of which is "dead land".[14]

The analytical framework of the *necropolitics* of land illuminates the intimate connections between present-day and ongoing demonstrations of brutal geopolitical power fuelled by territorial avarice and extractive resource greed, which directly result in widespread environmental destruction. The epistemologies of the Enlightenment-Man, which have historically produced this very logic, treating land as "inanimate",[15] passive, and ultimately exploitable, render it productive only through systematic human domination, extraction, and relentless commodification. Land as property came to mean that land, seen as idle if not productively used in capitalist terms, had to follow capital's ideology of "'never enough', which political economies of power exploit to govern through greed and fear".[16] With land a finite resource, this took the historical form of the brutal dispossession and destruction of the commons, creating new enclosures through primitive accumulation and the privatisation of land for its industrialised use.[17] The plantations, the mines, and the railway lines of colonial capitalism – at once both land-requiring and land-devouring – made this ideology of capital the reality of land, defined and forever altered its material existence. This ideology was so powerful that it became the very ontology of globalised capital, no longer merely one perspective on land, or even the world, but the very system that structures them. Fallow land thus emerges as the principal antagonist, the arch enemy, of capital. Overexploitation and abandonment are not opposites but dialectically linked outcomes of the same process. This history is far from over in two senses: the long-term consequences of destruction are

12 Mbembe, "Necropolitics", 11.
13 *Ibid*, 39-40.
14 The chapter "Dead Land, Dead Water" (pp. 149-210) in Saskia Sassen's 2014 book *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* introduces this notion.
15 Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*.
16 Fitz, Krasny, "Imagining Architecture Otherwise", 18.
17 See: Marx, "Primitive Accumulation"; Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*; Linebaugh, *Stop Thief!: The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance.*

etched into the land, while the modalities of extraction escalate into ever-new forms of devastation; from crushing to fracking to strip-mining, mountaintop removal, seabed exploitation, and industrial terraforming, in short, the near total commodification of the Earth.

Today land and bodies live with and suffer from the consequences of Man as a "geological force".[18] In the twenty-first century, this is widely debated under the concepts of the Anthropocene, the Capitalocene, and the Plantationocene.[19] These descriptors of Man-made geological histories compel a fuller reckoning with how the violent logic of colonial, capitalist, and fascist ideologies — through the production of death-worlds and dead land — are inscribed into the Earth itself. These processes corrode the very conditions under which land can reproduce, unleashing catastrophic consequences for human life, survival, and futurity. With capital not only a "relation to labour", but "also a relation to nature", there is the following central and death-making contradiction: "capitalist society makes 'economy' depend on 'nature', while dividing them ontologically. [...] Simultaneously needing and rubbishing nature, capitalism is in this respect, too, a cannibal that devours its own vital organs".[20] While our human bodies eat and absorb the products and effects of capitalist soil and land, such devouring of vitality endangers the planet as a whole, turning it into a danger zone. In 2025, because of the ongoing and accelerating violence against nature and land, we learned in the news that "Earth" was "entering a danger zone", having reached its first tipping point linked to greenhouse gas emissions.[21] Tipping points are caused by irreversible impact and "recognised by scientists as moments when an ecosystem reaches a point where severe degradation is inevitable".[22]

18 Foster, "Foreword", 11.

19 Despite the Anthropocene Working Group's proposal being rejected on March 26, 2024 by the International Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy, the concept of the Anthropocene still serves as a powerful framework for examining how human activity has left enduring geological traces. Since its introduction by Stoermer and Crutzen in 2000, geologists and critical scholars across many disciplines have used it to analyze the planetary impacts of capitalism's extractive, exploitative, and growth-driven systems that commodify land, bodies, and life itself. In addition, Capitalocene and Plantationocene were proposed to capture more specifically the forces behind planetary destruction. See: Crutzen, Stoermer, "The 'Anthropocene'"; Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin".

20 Fraser, *Cannibal Capitalism*, 83-84.

21 Readfearn, "Planet's First Catastrophic Climate Tipping Point Reached".

22 *Ibid*.

Taken together, geopolitical resource imperialism and centuries of colonial extraction and industrialisation, still continuing today in the name of capital accumulation, are relentlessly transforming the Earth into death-worlds and danger zones. In order to care for land critically, there is a need not only for critical diagnoses and analysis of the effects of historical violence, there is also the need to actively remember, rethink, and relearn imaginaries, epistemologies, and cosmologies of land outside of the cycles of perpetual violence that help restore the rights to land as the rights of land to care.

The Rights of Land

Reanimating land — that is, starting from the premise of the liveliness of land and its life-making capacities, which cannot be separated from the life-making capacities of land-bound beings, including humans — argues that land has rights in its own right. These intrinsic rights of land are built on the concepts of rights of nature or rights of water. Rights of nature recognise rivers or mountains as subjects of law and bearers of rights, which are legally enforceable.[23] In this sense, the rights of land here are inextricably linked with the rights to land which communities were violently dispossessed of by the historical forces of patriarchal colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism.

In 2008, Ecuador included Pachamama in its constitution to respect the material and immaterial dimensions of nature. In 2009, Bolivia also included nature's rights, with humans considered part of nature. In particular, Indigenous epistemologies are central to advancing the rights of nature and recognising them. The rights of land and the rights to land are thus most intimately linked in fighting geopolitical resource imperialism as capitalist expansion. The rights of land, while resisting the anthropocentric hubris of human exceptionalism, are intimately linked to the rights of human beings, as land is crucial to living and surviving, sustenance and well-being. Seeing the rights of land as interdependent with the rights of human beings, challenges modernity's separation from nature and proposes to integrate these rights into laws and ethics made by humans. Caring critically for the rights of land as the reanimation of land opposes and seeks to overcome modernity's compulsory norm of dualism, splitting human bodies from land and territories — as fundamentally challenged by the Indigenous communitarian feminist concept of *cuerpo-territorio* — as well as immaterial belief systems from material practices and technologies. We argue that this approach enacts a profound relational ontology, linking epistemologies, imaginaries, and material,

23 See: Tănăsescu, *Understanding the Rights of Nature*.

physical restoration while challenging dominant narratives of extractive governance and human exceptionalism.

While headlines and global news are, as we have shown earlier, dominated by geopolitical pressures on land and, to a lesser extent, by reporting geological catastrophes, we rarely, if ever, encounter news about humble, relational, long-term, and sustained practices of critical care in relation to land. Those who tend the land — those who initiate community gardens, soil regeneration projects, seed banks, or urban and rural commons — are seldom considered newsworthy. Ancient belief systems, Indigenous epistemologies or communitarian feminism are even less newsworthy. Newsworthiness very often equates with history-making and historicity, privileging spectacle over sustained relationality. The argument here, therefore, is that other histories of land care, practices of attentiveness, repair, and co-flourishing, are not merely ancillary but epistemically, ethically, and materially critical, demanding recognition alongside the grand narratives of human history and planetary transformation.

Ancient cosmologies, commonly referred to as myths, as well as Indigenous epistemologies, historically devalued and excluded from what counts as knowledge, provide ample evidence that human beings and land, both the soil, but also planet Earth, are seen as most intimately interconnected and interdependent. The interest here is how they are relevant to reanimating land and to understanding the rights of land as interconnected with the rights of human beings at an epistemological and spiritual level. As many ancient cosmologies suggest, there is a deep connection between humans and soil, or humans and land. In conclusion, a return to one ancient language and one such ancient belief system foregrounds the deep connection between land, humans, and care.

Thinking of the etymology of the word human, this epistemological, spiritual, and material link is expressed at the level of language itself. Humans are connected to humus, the Latin word for earth, soil, and ground. Literally, then, humans are beings of the earth. This etymological link underscores a deep, intrinsic connection between humans and the soil, implying that our very bodies and lives are tied to the land. Turning to Roman cosmologies, the myth of the Goddess Cura is a direct tie between humans, soil or land, and care. Hyginus's account of Cura in *Fabulae* (poem 220)[24] presents a strikingly prescient meditation on the constitution of human existence, framing ontology through relational and material dynamics. Cura, or "Care," discovers

24 Hyginus, *Fabulae.*

clay (*humus*) and fashions the first human, only for this act of creation to provoke a triadic dispute over proprietorship: Jupiter asserts a claim to the spirit, Tellus (Earth) to the body, and Cura to life itself. Saturn's adjudication, assigning the spirit to Jupiter upon death, the body to Earth, and life to Cura during existence, codifies a temporally and existentially stratified human ontology, wherein corporeality, vitality, and consciousness are inseparably yet unevenly distributed. The etymology of *homo*, rooted in *humus*, foregrounds the material constitution of humanity, while Cura's primacy in life underscores care as the organising principle of human relationality and experience. This positions *cura*, care, not merely as an ethical concern but as the very condition of being, situating humans at the intersection of earth, spirit, and attentive engagement with life.

We take Cura – Care, one of the paradoxically less prominent and almost forgotten Roman goddesses, as just one of many examples in ancient belief systems around the world that connect the ground, the human body, and the soul. Cura serves as an instructive lens through which to understand the deep links between the material and immaterial concerns of land and humans. Taking inspiration from ancient knowledge, the intrinsic rights of land demand its reanimation in order to restore life. Life-making lies at the heart of the obligations of critical care. Critical care is not only a form of resistance to the violence of death-making, but also a long-term process of caretaking — of land care — that reanimates the life-making capacities of land.

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02a

ART LIVING LAB TO REPAIR THE LAND (ALILAND), 2025/2026

zero phase of the project

first phase of the project: Living Lab

second phase of the project: Art Nature Based Solutions

Agriculture Aftermath, Wietstock, Germany
(mediator: Susanne Burmester, Kunstverein Rügen e.V.)

Electricity Aftermath, Šibenik, Croatia
(mediator: Sonja Leboš, Association for Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Research)

Energy Aftermath, Barruelo de Santullán, Spain
(mediator: Alfredo Escapa Presa, Concomitentes)

The Power of Conflicts and the Knowledge of the People

Field report by the mediator for citizen-commissioned art

Susanne Burmester

When I travelled to a small village in Western Pomerania in the winter of 2018 for an initial meeting with potential actors under the New Patrons model, I passed by a grey building at the village entrance. Rio Reiser's song title "Der Traum ist aus" [The dream is over] was written on it in large letters. I felt my expectations had been confirmed. Nothing really worked here anymore. The agricultural production cooperative was wound up, people moved away, the nursery and the shop were closed, and the roads were full of potholes. Social life? Non-existent! Culture? Why and for whom? The cliché was that people who lived here had no future. Of course, it was completely different and, above all, completely different from what I had expected.

As light snow fell, I was greeted by four villagers, each with utterly diverse reasons for living in a village near the Polish border: the first one, a graphic designer who had discovered an abandoned barn and thus a niche of freedom during the GDR era. The second was the former chief engineer of the model pig breeding farm, and his colleague, the milking master, a passionate hunter and a declared enemy of the return of the wolf. Finally, there was the young historian who had moved here with his family because he wanted his children to grow up in the countryside. That these four people wanted to work together defied all expectations.

Time is Also Short in the Village

At the next meeting, the group grew. A shepherd joined, as did a psychologist who was there only on weekends, a project manager and the former cook of the GDR animal production facility. The group seemed perfectly suited to become New Patrons. They had a cause, different voices were represented, and they recognised the need to get everyone on board if the village was to develop.

At each subsequent meeting, we delved deeper into the problems facing the village. There was a feeling of powerlessness because of not being able to sufficiently shape the future that was happening after 1990. There was a loss of self-determination due to the subsequent incorporation into a larger municipality and a lack of financial and human resources to maintain the 120-inhabitant village and its church. In well-timed harmony, we felt our way forward, turned over every stone and questioned every thesis five times. The question was what kind of artwork should be created here, and, above all, what should it achieve? The group quickly dismissed the obvious ideas for a mural in the village hall or the redesigning of the urn cemetery. It soon became clear to everyone that they wanted a more fundamental change for the village.

Time passed, but the assignment that everyone could agree on was slow in coming. The group became reluctant and was unsure “whether our expectations were still the same”. Progress was slow, and the group blamed the mediator for this. Even though her somewhat helpless use of questionnaires failed to calm their impatience, the most important step towards the assignment followed. The group thanked the mediator for the material they developed together, held a meeting without her, and presented a written commission to the artists that everyone could agree on. What did we learn from this? Conflicts are productive when those involved acknowledge them and take joint responsibility for finding a solution.

The First Commission

The invited artist, Antje Majewski, was to work with nature as the common denominator of the villagers in order to design the future village life. She proposed a baking oven with a mosaic image and a community garden. Due to the pandemic, there was no opportunity to meet in person, and the patrons felt misunderstood. After the first few had expressed criticism, others followed suit. They perceived the proposals as clichéd prejudices about life in the countryside and resisted them. One thing was now clear: they wanted to do everything possible to ensure that the commission was fulfilled in accordance with their wishes.

In view of the harsh criticism, the artist had already drafted a farewell letter. But because she was intelligent and had a great deal of experience in collective work contexts, she made a new proposal, which the group eventually accepted. This included a mosaic picture that brought together



Storks in Wietstock. Photo: Victoria Tomaschko



“What should the role of a village community garden be?”, July 2025. Photo: Victoria Tomaschko



plants and animals important to the villagers and a multifunctional pavilion designed to host a variety of outdoor activities. It became clear that in conflicts, those involved must take a stand. Different perspectives are given a platform, and negotiation processes are initiated. The cards are on the table; the playing field is reset.

> "Nowadays people only leave the house when the delivery service brings the neighbour a new refrigerator." (Heinz)

> "This plant is ugly, doesn't belong here and should be removed. But when I saw the bees crawling into the inconspicuous flowers, I decided to leave it alone." (Sieglinde)

Others Also Want to Get Involved

The mayor, her deputy and other villagers also attended a large meeting held behind the village community centre. A local association funded the renovation of the village hall, and the local council now had ideas on how it could be used. They wanted to have more influence on the activities and for the results to be seen as their own success. A village club that organises festivals and holds annual karaoke events at the nearby lake requested space for a marquee but did not want the pavilion too close to the village hall. The deputy mayor took on the artist's idea to generate electricity for the village hall with solar panels on the pavilion rooftop and saw the chance to relieve the burden on the municipal coffers. Being open to suggestions and with a great deal of understanding for community-minded decisions, the artist followed suit and integrated these ideas into her design.

Resistance to Green Indoctrination

The economic change in the East after the peaceful revolution in 1990 hit people in rural areas particularly hard. Agricultural businesses were wound up. People lost their jobs and, with them, often the social centre of their lives. In Wietstock, too, many were forced to take jobs they were overqualified for



“It is usually the women who tend to their family gardens”, July 2025.
Photo: Victoria Tomaschko



“Private gardens are little paradises, but also laboratories for the future”, July 2025.
Photo: Victoria Tomaschko



New Patrons of Wietstock, from left to right: Susanne Burmester (mediator), Birgit Prasdorf, Franzi Reek-Siewert, Dörte Kummert-Lübken, Katrin Peter, Anja Ludolph. Heidi Wurm, Tina Netzband, Sieglinde Priem, Bernd Rohleder, Lisa Marie Steude (coordinator), July 2025. Photo: Victoria Tomaschko





Bernd Rohleder, who used to be a shepherd and now runs an experimental garden, July 2025. Photo: Victoria Tomaschko

or those that required travelling long distances. Today, it is often forgotten how much pressure people were under to transform – and how successfully they have repositioned themselves.

Even back then, however, many people felt that their reality had nothing to do with urban life and that a party like the Green Party (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) had little to offer them. Their agenda is strongly rooted in the West German alternative movement. East German environmental initiatives were also viewed negatively by the general population because they were linked to the church and opposed the state that had given them work. Nature conservation issues were seen as patronising, and negative attitudes were reinforced by agricultural policy programmes against wolves, the ban on pesticides, the construction of wind farms and, finally, the 2023 Heating Act. Ultimately, the Fridays for Future movement polarised society, and the right-wing AfD party (Alternative for Germany) used anti-Green rhetoric to mobilise the masses.

> "Community is important to me; that's why you move to the village. You help each other and spend time together." (Tina)

> "It often seems as if others do the thinking and we are only allowed to work. I don't like that; I want to be involved in shaping things." (Katrin)

Against this backdrop, climate change and nature conservation were not topics discussed in the first phase of the project. Local standpoints were too diverse, and potential disputes were best avoided because the village was already divided. This created a void as nature was the common denominator for all villagers, and included its acute endangerment.

The artist Antje Majewski noticed that something was wrong here during her first walk through the community. While the villagers cultivated idyllic gardens in their own backyards, the village was surrounded by the monoculture of industrial agriculture. The harvesting machines of the corporation based in southern Germany often circled the village for days on end, robbing the residents of their sleep. The private gardens seemed like places of resistance and were at the same time laboratories for dealing with the increasing drought. As so often in the projects of New Patrons, it was the invited artist



For years, this house welcomed visitors with the Rio Reiser songline “The dream is over!”, November 2018. Photo: Susanne Burmester


DER TRAUM IST AUS!



“Although the village community house is a wonderful place, the 150 residents are at odds over how it should be used”, September 2020. Photo: Michael Kirsten



who put her finger on the wound and recognised where a work of art could make a difference.

> "I don't have time for my own garden, but it's important to me to get something off the ground with others, which is why I'm participating here!" (Franzi)

> "When I see the results of our project with the artist in 20 years' time, I'll know that I played a part in it." (Constance)

Standstill and New Beginning

After a wall mosaic by artist Antje Majewski was completed as a sub-project, discussions about the planned pavilion broke down. The conflict between the municipality and the association that runs the village hall intensified and remains unresolved in legal terms to this day. Behind these lay various lines of conflict, ranging from private feuds to political claims. Here, as in many other villages, ideas about how long-term residents and newcomers can live together differ, and there are few mediating authorities and often no longer any places where people can meet. Efforts to organise funding for the art project had to be halted for the time being because the municipality would not have given its approval.

When we were able to resume discussions in the village in 2025 with the EU project *Art Living Lab to Repair the Land* (ALILAND), the attitudes of many villagers towards nature conservation and climate change had changed. By then, everyone had experienced first-hand how severe the drought in this region had become and how necessary it was to find new strategies to deal with it. To overcome the stagnation in the village, a few pragmatic people formed a new initiative to develop activities for the village children and to take care of the garden plot behind the village hall.

"We welcome anyone who wants to pick up a shovel" was the villagers' motto. Since the village hall was inaccessible, they focused on the 3,000 square metre garden plot. Meeting regularly, they worked outdoors, reclaiming public space through purposeful, results-oriented gatherings. Acting voluntarily, they discussed how the village's cohesion could improve through their relationship



The village's volunteer fire brigade is planting a plane tree to provide shade, November 2025. Photo: Lisa Marie Steude



"The community garden is intended to be a place where people can do things together", July 2025. Photo: Birgit Prasdorf



“A good harvest is only possible with extra watering, because there is not enough rain”, August 2022. Photo: Susanne Burmester





Together with the artist, the group is designing an apple-shaped ornament that will serve as a model for a path system, January 2026. Photo: Susanne Burmester



with nature. The new mayor and council approved the activities, and plans began for an arts commission.

A Village Garden as a Laboratory and Repository of Knowledge

How can a just transition to the urgently needed energy transition take place? This is the fundamental question of the EU-funded project, and in this small community in eastern Germany, ecological issues always touch on social issues. At the heart of the commission discussions are individual village gardens as places of knowledge production and resistance to the consequences of industrial agriculture and climate change. The community garden is to be continued as a starting point for sustainable coexistence and as a knowledge repository that can also convey to others what is important today.

Ideas about what constitutes a good garden vary. Some people love the wild growth of nature and intervene only minimally, which then also gives space to other living creatures. However, they often fail to see that rampant weeds also have an impact on neighbours and public spaces. Others prefer a tidy garden where only what is beautiful or useful has its place. Kitchen gardens, ornamental gardens and also wild gardens can be found in Wietstock side by side. Some provide their families with healthy, fresh vegetables and keep small livestock such as chickens and rabbits.

> “Back then, we always sat together and celebrated. Today, everyone sits around at home on their own. I want to change that.” (Bernd)

> “My own garden is there so that I can feed myself and know what I’m eating. In the village garden, others can learn about this too.” (Bernd)

> “I’m participating because we need places where we can come together. You don’t need a key for the garden, everyone is invited, and that promotes cohesion.” (Birgit)



Appreciating the beauty of giant knotweed, formerly regarded as an unpleasant weed, August 2025. Photo: Lisa Marie Steude



Preparing for the tour of the private gardens, June 2026.
Photo: Christiane Burwitz

On the Way to the Job

When it comes to the village garden, differing opinions have been put aside, and everyone seems to prefer a discovery garden rather than a show garden. Their own knowledge, which has changed over the years, should be reflected there. Perhaps the garden could even address the conflicts in the village? Is the water that does not flow perhaps also a symbol of the disrupted communication between people? Some now welcome invasive weeds and exotic plants. Everyone agrees on more biodiversity. Can the garden show how fruitful diversity is for human communities as well? What role do the consequences of climate change play ecologically, but also socially? How do you deal with the much stronger winds of recent years and the need for shade for plants and people? While these issues were taboo in the early years, they are now being consciously addressed by the villagers. Something has clearly changed here.

> "We supply ourselves with produce from our vegetable garden in summer but digging also grounds me and puts me in touch with the plants." (Birgit)

> "Enthusiasm is the key word for me. I'm interested in how things will continue in the village and in creating something for the children." (Katrin)

The garden group became a commissioner in its own right. They adopted Antje Majewski's original concept of a pavilion with solar panels, a mosaic, and a community garden. Working with the artist, they focused on ecological aspects and on the garden as a space for collective action. Inspired by her artistic ideas, they chose to draw up a plan for the future rather than simply celebrate an outdated notion of how rural communities are organized.

Antje Majewski accepted the commission and re-entered the process. She is not one of those artists who create a design in her studio and then implement it. She seeks dialogue with her patrons and wants to go through all the planning steps together with them. Nevertheless, she does not give up her artistic independence but sees herself as providing a critical external perspective on the situation and the wishes of the patrons. The first action

on 8 November was to plant a plane tree and several other drought-resistant fruit trees to provide shade. The group is organising a public event for this purpose and is being supported by the local volunteer fire brigade and other villagers. This is how the art project has become public and how other villagers have become involved.

The Time Factor in the New Patrons Model

Since 2017, this small village in Western Pomerania has been undergoing a process that is having an impact. The initial impression that everyone here is living in a happy neighbourhood has not been confirmed. Some say that it was the New Patrons' project that created the conflicts, while others believe it merely brought existing conflicts to light. In any case, the villagers themselves have embarked on a process that has brought about change. People who did not know each other well before are now sharing their knowledge, and prejudices are being broken down, while the voices that no one wanted to hear before are now being heard. The cliché that people in eastern Germany only complain and do not take responsibility is being shattered in Wietstock. Often, it was the diffuse situation in which the "doers" became listless that made other voices heard, voices that significantly advanced the thought process behind the project.

The project in Wietstock shows the power that civil society communication can unleash based on the New Patrons model. *The Protocol*, which was drafted by François Hers in 1990, is a kind of rulebook without rules. It opens a playing field in which the participants can act, and it assigns interconnected roles and yet shifts individual responsibility. What the "game" is about is determined by everyone through joint action. In its openness, the protocol gives all participants the opportunity for "artistic thinking". Because restrictions on thinking are lifted, needs and resources that were previously invisible come to light. Local knowledge and individual skills become productive and previously silent actors are heard.

Without the artwork that is created as a result, however, the processes would have no focus. Along the way, much more happens than project management can control. The protocol enables an exemplary democratic process. All participants leave their familiar locations to reposition themselves – perhaps even to reinvent themselves as a community. Ideally, they will experience that it is not harmony but dissent that produces the most productive results.

In any case, they will experience that their commitment is meaningful and becomes publicly visible.

Participation with impact is at the heart of the New Patrons model, as is the external perspective of the artists. The artistic design condenses the entire process and makes it publicly visible. The participants become a community of knowledgeable individuals; they are the experts on their own commission. But it does not stop there. The art project unfolds its power in an ambivalent structure that is never merely an illustration of the commission. The artistic "added value" liberates the question developed by the commissioning group and passes it on to society. In this case, the "art mediators" are the citizens themselves, the patrons and all those for whom the work was developed.

> "I want to promote community spirit and work with others to create something for the village." (Heidrun)

> "Once you've baked the cake, you want to eat a piece too." (Franzi)

Good project management requires efficiency. Someone wears the hat, pursues a goal unwaveringly, sticks to the schedule, and in conflict situations, one may even "walk over dead bodies". With the New Patrons, one can learn what it means to do things differently. No one wears the hat; everyone talks to each other on an equal footing, and every new idea that comes up is pursued. Most important, however, are the conflicts. Only when they arise do individuals take responsibility. If they do not arise, there is a lack of trust within the group.

Democracy does not mean that everyone agrees. Democracy means welcoming dissent and differences of opinion and entering a negotiation process. And that is only possible if there is room for it. In this sense, the New Patrons model of action is both a host and an encouragement. It offers space and time.

Electricity Aftermath – Towards a Resilient City

Sonja Leboš

> *Šibenik seems to have its own continually evolving manifesto that has morphed in each era of time to fit the contemporary geo-political economic realities, thanks to the city's "fortunate" geographic positioning.*
>
> (Hilgefort, "The Šibenik Outsider Syndrome [SOS]", 101.)

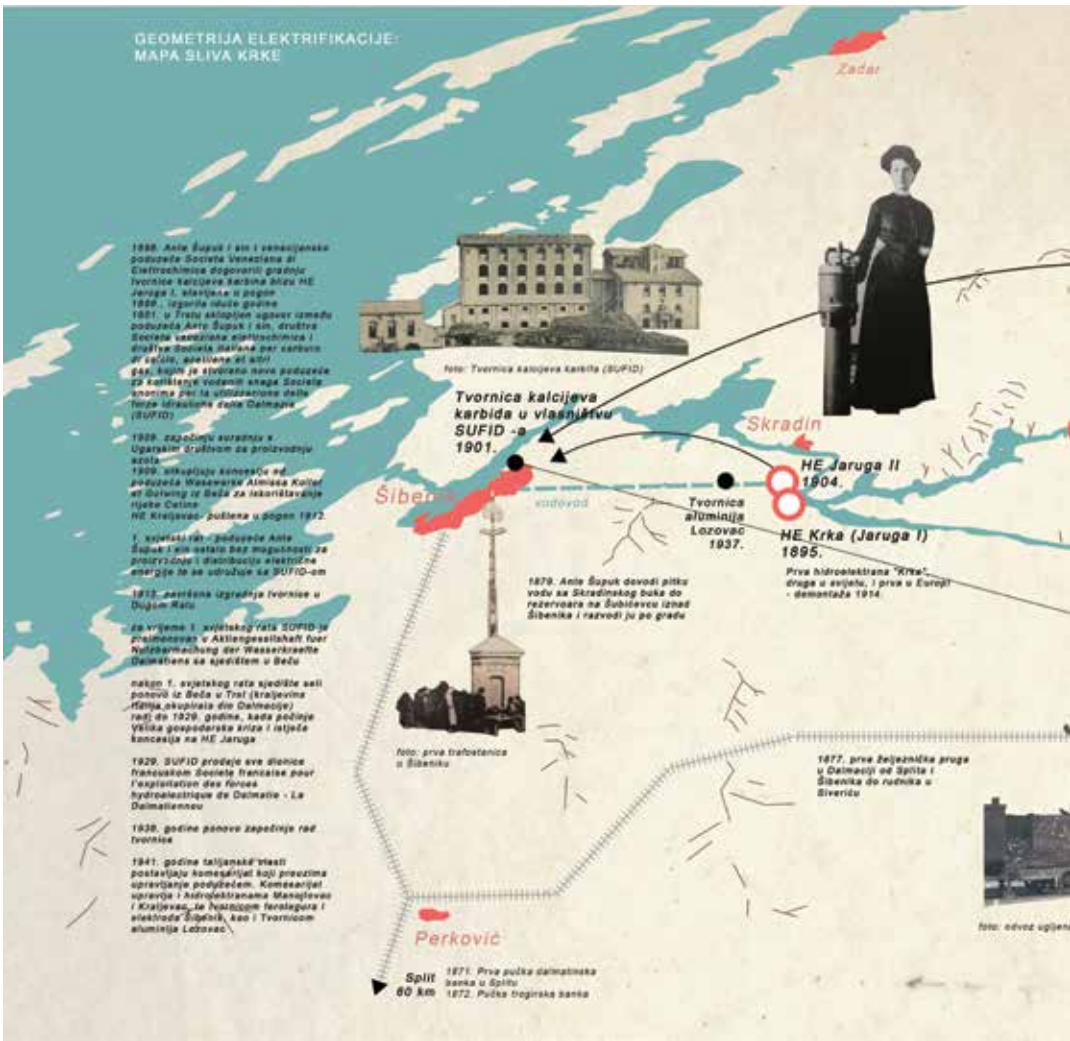
When I came to Šibenik in 2014 to research the post-socialist transformation of that beautiful Dalmatian city with a distinctive medieval nucleus,[1] the transformation of the area of Crnica that is the focus of this project had just entered a new phase. Although all of the coastal cities in Croatia that had been industrially (over)developed in socialism (Rijeka, Split, Šibenik, Zadar) suffered from post-socialist de-industrialisation and consequent (over)-touristification, Šibenik's transformation from an industrial to a service-economy driven city is a very specific case study. Therefore, in the first part of this text, I will provide a historical background of the case.[2] After that, I will try to give an overview of the commissioning process and the first steps of the commissioned artwork production by the artist Lana Stojićević.

Šibenik was one of the first cities in the world to use alternating current: electricity illuminated its streets in 1895.[3] At the end of the 19th century, at

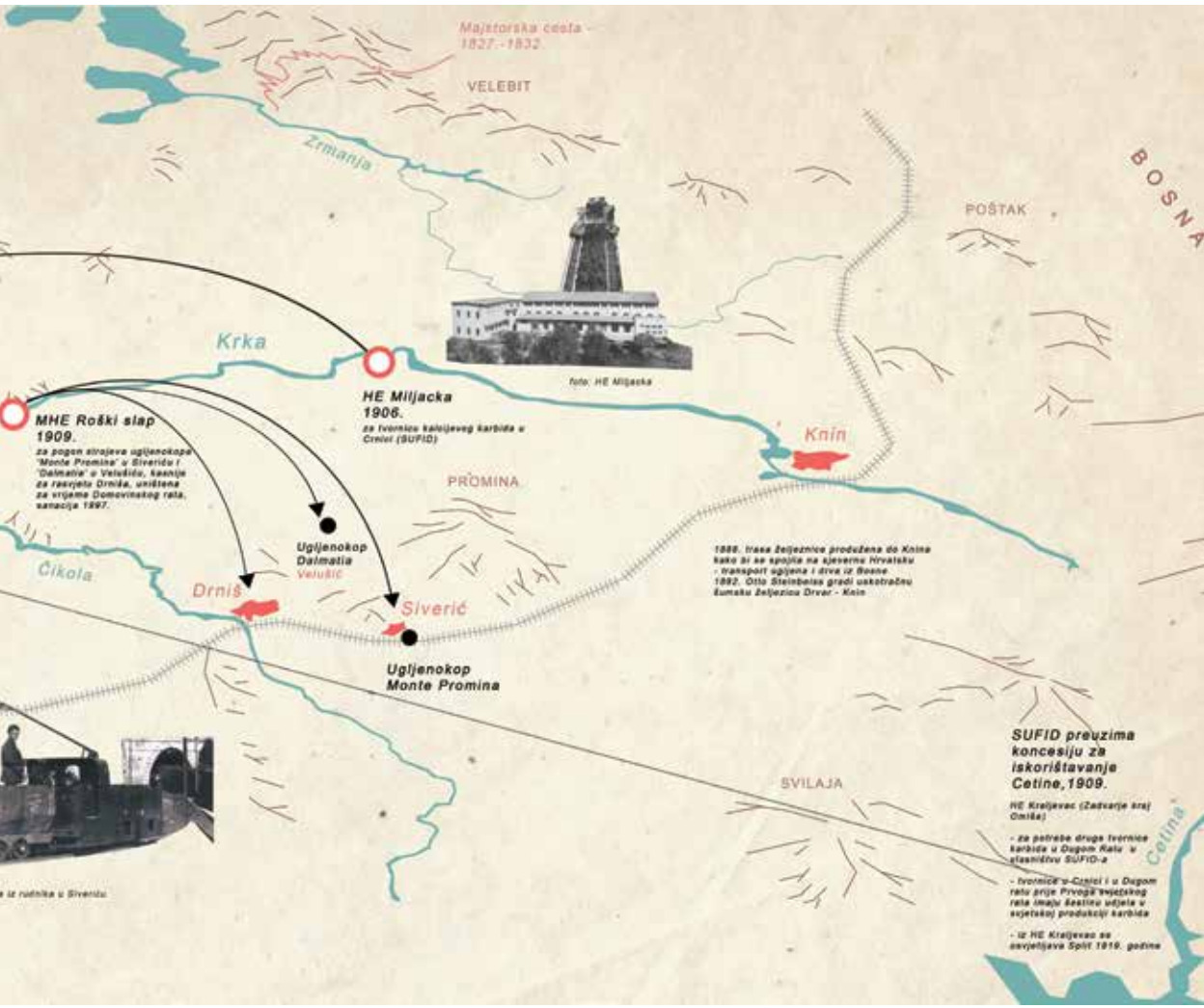
1 Initial research was conducted with the architect Dafne Berc.

2 Historical background is given according to the archival research that was conducted from 2014-2021 within the Association for Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Research annual programs, supported by Foundation "Kultura nova", City of Zagreb, Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia, and additional consulting the bibliography partly listed below. The archival research was conducted in the Croatian State Archives in Šibenik and Zadar. This research was partly presented in the form of the exhibition "Geometry of Electrification" (authors: Dario Crnogaća and Ana Selak, architects, Sonja Leboš, curator), in the Urban Centre of Šibenik in 2021. See the following links for more details: https://www.uiii.hr/exhibitions/geometrija-elektrifikacije and https://www.uiii.hr/exhibitions/geometrija-elektrifikacije-izlozba.

3 The Croatian Electricity company HEP [Hrvatska Elektroprivreda / Croatian Electro-Economy] marks the same year and date as the day of its inception.



An image from the exhibition “Geometry of Electrification”, Urban Centre Šibenik: the historical development of electric energy production and protochemical industry in and around Šibenik, 2021. (authors: Dario Crnogaća and Ana Selak, architects, Sonja Leboš, curator)


Majstorska cesta
1827.-1832.
VELEBIT
Zrmanja
POŠTAK
BOSNA
Krka
foto: HE Miljacka
HE Miljacka
1906.
za tvornicu kalcijevog karbida u Crnici (SUFID)
MHE Roški slap
1909.
za pogon strojeva ugljenokopa 'Monte Promina' u Siveriću i 'Dalmatia' u Veliušiću, kasnije za rasvjetu Drniša, uništena za vrijeme Domovinskog rata, sanacija 1997.
Knin
PROMINA
Ugljenokop
Dalmatia
Veliušić
1888. trasa željeznice produžena do Knina kako bi se spojila na sjevernu Hrvatsku - transport ugljena i drva iz Bosne
1892. Otto Steinbeiss gradi uskotračnu šumsku željezicu Drvar - Knin
Čikola
Drniš
Siverić
Ugljenokop
Monte Promina
SVILAJA
SUFID preuzima koncesiju za iskorištavanje Cetine, 1909.
HE Kraljevac (Zadvarje kraj Omiša)
- za potrebe druge tvornice karbida u Dugom Ratu u vlasništvu SUFID-a
- tvornice u Crnici i u Dugom Ratu prije Prvoga svjetskog rata imaju šestinu udjela u svjetskoj proizvodnji karbida
- iz HE Kraljevac se osvjetljava Split 1910. godine
Cetina



An image from the exhibition “Geometry of Electrification”, Urban Centre Šibenik: the map of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the involvement of different companies in extraction, development of electric energy production and protochemical industry in and around Šibenik, 2021. (authors: Dario Crnogaća and Ana Selak, architects, Sonja Leboš, curator)

the time of Šibenik's initial electrification, Croatia was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. So, the research that we undertook within the project *Geometry of Electrification* (ongoing since 2019), tackled the ways imperial power inflected the eco-history, as well as the water and energy economies in the particular area of Šibenik and its vicinity.

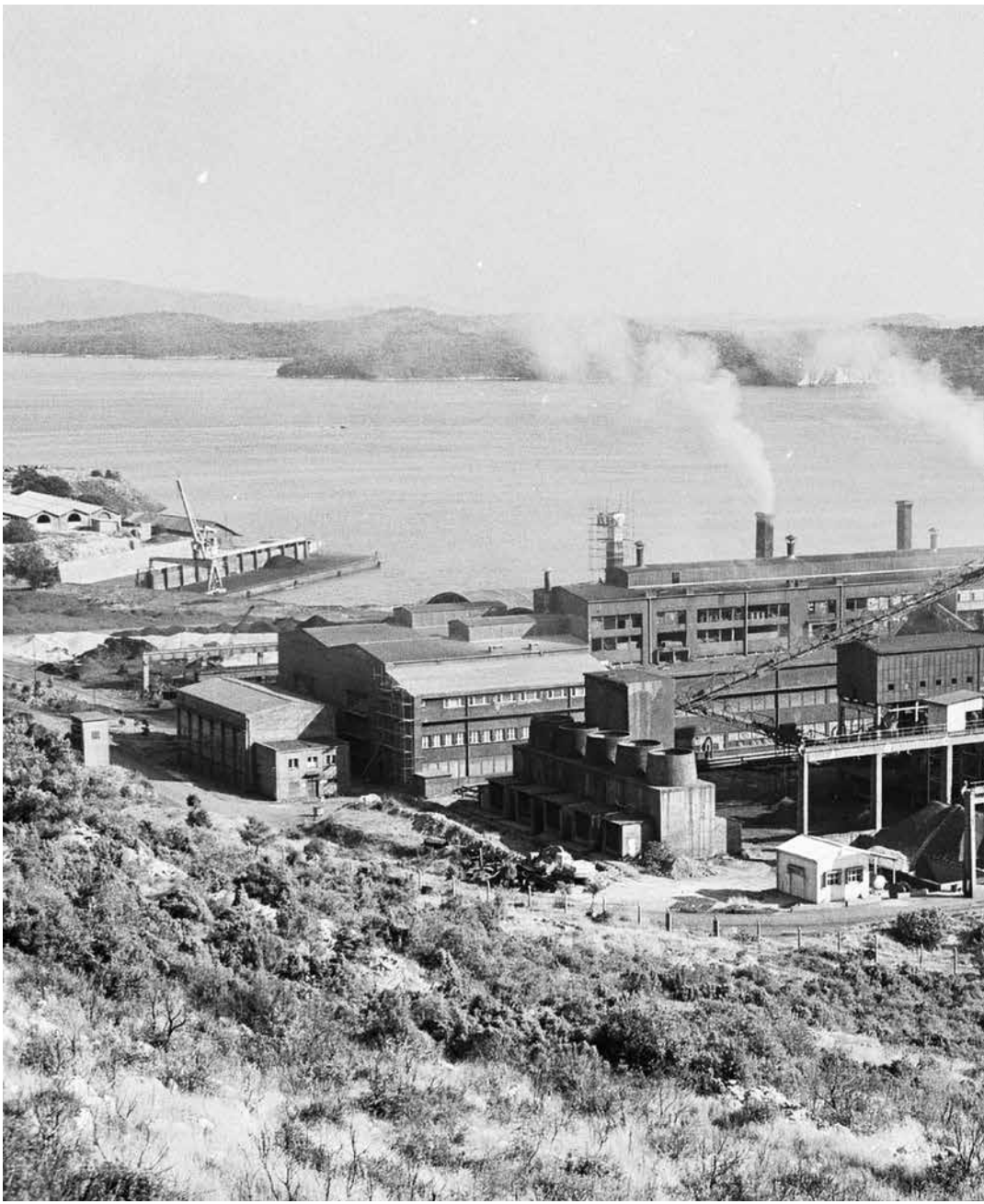
The first power plant that enabled the illumination and later also the industrialisation of Šibenik was built on the nearby river Krka. The Jaruga power plant (sometimes also called "Krka"), was not just the first alternating current (AC) power system in Croatia but also one of the first in Europe, and one of the few in the world existing at the time. The two generators (42 Hz, 550 kW each) and the transformers were produced and installed by the Hungarian company Ganz. The transmission line from the power plant to the city of Šibenik was 11.5 kilometres long, constructed on wooden pillars, with the municipal distribution grid including six substations.

> "I hope that the final product will be something that speaks to the subject and makes a statement about it. I also hope that the artistic process, because of its inclusiveness, will help encourage the residents of Crnica and Šibenik to get involved in spatial thinking." (Ana)

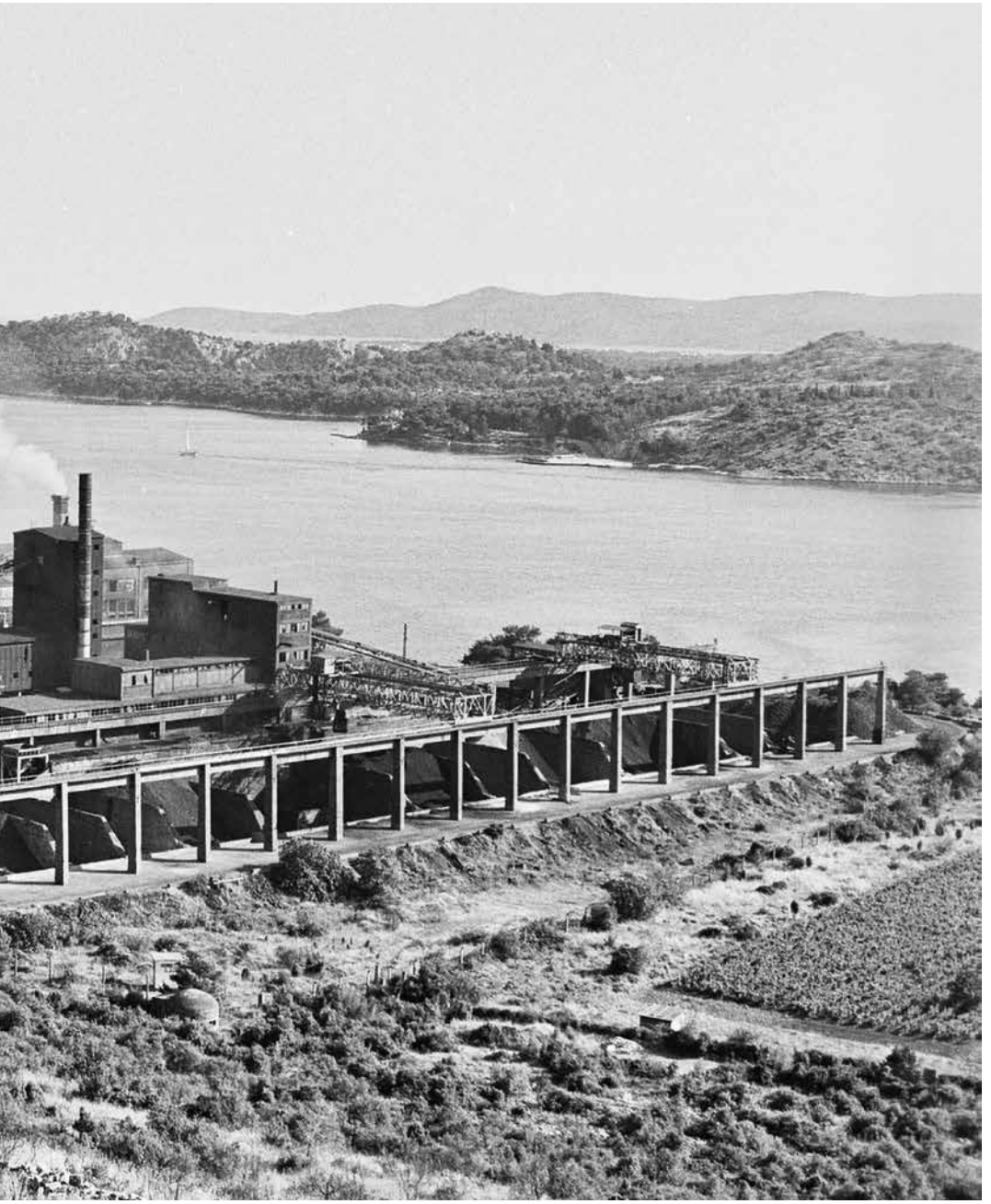
It all started with Marko Šupuk, the son of the then mayor of Šibenik, Ante Šupuk, visiting the exhibition in Frankfurt, which, in a way, marked the "second industrial revolution" – a revolution that would bring about fundamental changes similar to those created 100 years before by the introduction of the steam engine. In 1891, the German electrical industry was ready to demonstrate its capabilities to the world at the International Electro-technical Exhibition in Frankfurt, which enabled the transmission of alternating current over a distance of 175 kilometres.[4]

In 1893, the mayor of Šibenik Ante Šupuk and the municipal surveyor Vjekoslav Meichsner expanded their business by obtaining a license to use the waters of the River Krka for a hydroelectric plant, after they had accumulated sufficient capital on the water supply system of Šibenik (finished in 1879). Construction of the Hydroelectric plant Jaruga started on 22 March

4 Alternate current can be transmitted at a much greater distance than it is the case with direct current.



Tvornica elektroda i ferolegura — TEF [Electrode and Ferroalloy Factory] in Šibenik, Crnica district, 1960's. Photo: Ante Baranić



1894 and took only 17 months, at the time a very short period. Jaruga was initiated on 28 August 1895, only three days after the inauguration of the most famous world hydroelectric plant on Niagara Falls (Edward Dean Adams Power Plant, went into operation on 25 August 1895).

Only two months before the initiation of the Jaruga hydroplant, Šupuk and Meichsner finalised the contract that established the company *Šupuk and Meichsner – the first subsidised electric plant in Dalmatia "Krka"*. There is no doubt that Šupuk appreciated the innovation offered by Meichsner: while all the cities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire used direct current, Šupuk supported the innovation of alternating current. Whether they heard about Tesla, it remains to be seen — archive documentation shows no connection.

> "With participation in the project we could all take a closer look at the matter to perceive the significance of this area for the whole city, and to bring these observations nearer to citizens of Crnica and Šibenik — altogether with examples of how the architectural and the urban planning profession in cooperation with citizens can provide functional, healthy and meaningful spaces to live. Especially, we need to emphasize the approach that is missing in the process of urban planning of this specific area, with citizens having no real opportunity to act or participate in the process. It leaves us with various questions still unanswered, such as recovery of the land, plausibility of spatial plans, etc." (Bruna)

The first hydroelectric power plant "Jaruga" near Šibenik, and the transmission of energy enabled by alternating current, met the modern needs of energy supply: 1) the production of electric energy; 2) the transmission of the electric energy; 3) the distribution of electric energy.

Electric energy consequentially sped up the industrialisation of Šibenik. Some factories started to use electric energy, such as the Inchiostri pasta factory, Šupuk's mill,[5] and some others, including liqueur production, and textile

5 Located on the site where today the Šibenik's Main Bus Station is (Vrulje).



Public event “Conversations about Crnica”, closing the first part of the ALILAND project, November 2025. Photo: Valerio Baranović



Public event “Conversations about Crnica”, a commissioner, Davorka Blažević, an investigative journalist, presents her long-term research on contamination, deindustrialisation, and transformation of Crnica, November 2025. Photo: Valerio Baranović

industry.[6] Šibenik's City Theatre, at its beginnings *Teatro Mazzoleni*, was the first public theatre in the region that was illuminated by electric energy.

The second factory of calcium carbide was built in Šibenik's Crnica district in 1899,[7] and subsequently owned by the *Società Anonima per la Utilizzazione delle Forze Idrauliche della Dalmazia* (SUFID) with its headquarters in Trieste, which at the time was the main port of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The second port was Rijeka, and the third was Šibenik.

The second hydro-plant, "Jaruga II", was completed in 1903 (with twice the power of Jaruga I), exclusively to meet the needs of the proto-chemical industry in Crnica, located approximately a kilometre away from the heart of the medieval city of Šibenik.

> "I hope that this project would encourage the municipality to develop a stronger awareness of ecological issues and the importance of careful planning for such a significant part of the city, especially with regard to green spaces." (Dario)

> "One of the key goals of the project is animating and even mobilizing the local community to participate in deciding on the valorization of this space in the function of citizens' needs." (Davorka)

The industrial modernisation and the rise of the bourgeoisie class, as well as the transformation of rural areas into industrial ones, were inspired by Šupuk's entrepreneurial decision to invest the capital he had accumulated by constructing a water supply system, into the electric energy production.

During WWI, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy took control over SUFID, and it was registered as *Aktiengesellschaft für Nutzbarmachung der Wasserkrafte Dalmatiens* [Trade Company for Exploitation of the Dalmatian's Waterpower]. In those times, Dalmatia was a very important site of primary extraction; besides water, there was coal, marble, salt, cement marl, gypsum, and bauxite. After WWI, the power struggle around Šibenik, for its water and

6 Šprljan, "Industrijski objekti u Šibeniku", 101-118.
7 The first factory vanished in fire.



Public workshop “Around, about and apropos Crnica (Conversations about Crnica II)”, March 2026. Photo: Valerio Baranović



Public workshop “Around, about and apropos Crnica (Conversations about Crnica II)”, a commissioner, Mate Rupić, a landscape architect, moderates the discussion, March 2026. Photo: Valerio Baranović



Public workshop “Around, about and apropos Crnica (Conversations about Crnica II)”, a lecture on spatial planning by Kristina Perkov, an architect, March 2026. Photo: Valerio Baranović



Public workshop “Around, about and apropos Crnica (Conversations about Crnica II)”, a public walk in Crnica with a botanist Milenko Milović, March 2026. Photo: Valerio Baranović

electricity supply, was fought between Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia). By 1925, the Kingdom signed a contract with the imperial French Society of Tunisian Phosphates, Fertilisers, and Chemical Products, and that is how another multinational trust emerged (SEFFHIED), soon to be renamed La *Dalmatienne*, which was active throughout WWII.

After WWII, *La Dalmatienne* had been nationalised, and started to produce silicocalcium by 1946, and a wide range of ferroalloy products by 1948. *Tvornica elektroda i ferolegura* – TEF [Electrode and Ferroalloy Factory], became one of the strategic factories in the Socialist Republic of Croatia (one of the six republics of Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia – SFRY), exporting its products all over the world.[8]

> "I identify myself as an active participant in the making of this place and care about its future..." (Katarina)

> "I believe this artwork can have a positive impact on my city." (Maja)

Already during the 1991-1995 war over the inheritance of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia,[9] TEF was one of the factories that was blacklisted by the government of the Republic of Croatia, since it was in the way of the neocolonial touristification of the new country. The Republic of Croatia tried to lose its prefix "socialist" by all means available – the destruction of all industrial plants among them. The furnaces of TEF stopped working in 1994, and the factory's chimneys were knocked down in 1996, precisely 30 years ago. Unfortunately, the fields of Crnica are not just another "brownfield" site, although the promises for its transformation into an "elite neighbourhood" have been on the table ever since 1996.[10] Namely, the costs of decontaminating the remnants of the ferroalloy production have been mounting proportionally with the appetites of the potential investors.[11]

8 "Osam decenija tradicije", 13.
9 On the territory of Croatia, the war lasted from 1991 to 1995. However, war operations were conducted also on the territories of Slovenia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.
10 Klisović, "Čađavi TEF ustupa mjesto elitnoj šibenskoj četvrti?", 24.
11 Blažević, "Nikad završena priča o sanaciji šibenskog TEF-a".



Public workshop “Around, about and apropos Crnica (Conversations about Crnica II)”, a public walk in Crnica with a botanist Milenko Milović, March 2026. Photo: Valerio Baranović





The artwork “Black Hill” by Lana Stojićević, performance for photography, 2015.
Photo: Goran Radošević. More at: https://www.lanastojicevic.com/black-hill/



Around 2014, the City of Šibenik gave its citizens a city beach – the Banj beach.[12] It was greeted with joy by the citizens of Šibenik, who wanted to see a brighter future, without industry and with tourism. However, what the citizens turned a blind eye to was the fact that the beach with the service facility was built directly below the factory's ground and that the remnants of the ferroalloy production were all over the site: slag heaps in the form of very visible black hills are still there, and much of the less visible toxic waste is sedimented not only in the soil but probably also in the sea water. In recent years, not many citizens of Šibenik have been going to Banj beach.

> "The process has been an opportunity to exchange ideas and opinions with other members of my community." (Mate)

> "Taking part in this project was an opportunity to contribute my perspective to it." (Mia)

When we got the chance to work on this topic within the ALILAND project, the first task was to assemble the commissioners' group. I invited the architects I had collaborated with previously; they invited their younger colleagues, who then recommended or invited more people who live in or work in (or both) the neighbourhood of Crnica. By March 2025, the group of nine citizens who wanted to explore the situation of Crnica more thoroughly was assembled.[13]

Within the first part of the project, we had four formal and at least as many informal meetings that led to the formation of the commission. By late autumn 2025, the Croatian group of New Patrons (Working Group Crnica) had its commission written down. That key document for the New Patrons general methodology, in this particular case included the following conclusion:

12 Ferić, "Obljetnica koju smo zaboravili" Another, much cleaner Šibenik's popular beach, is Jadrija, logged into the registry of protected Croatian cultural heritage architectural sites. However, spending time on Jadrija requires a short drive by car or boat, and it is not easily accessible to less affluent Šibenik's citizens.

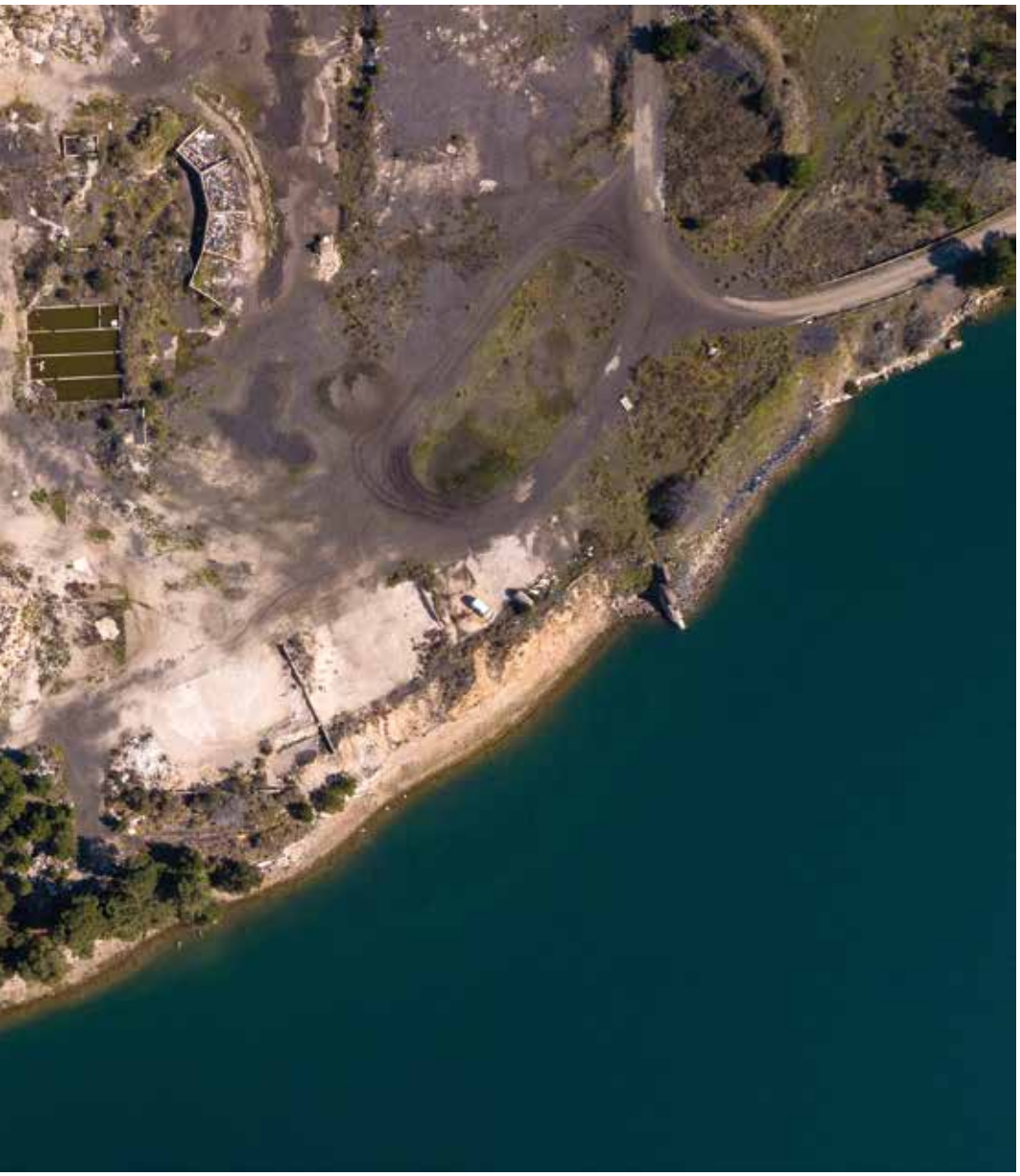
13 The members of Working Group Crnica, as we call it, are: Bruna Alfier (architect), Mia Belamarić (art educator), Davorka Blažević (journalist), Dario Crnogaća (architect), Katarina Nanjara (architect), Mate Rupić (landscape architect), Ana Selak (architect), Maja Šintić (sociologist), Tomislav Travčić (sport educator).

Most of our discussions revolved around two main topics: a) the long-term non-use of the area of the former Electrode and Ferroalloy Factory (TEF); b) the possible residual contamination of the Crnica area and discussions on how to determine the potential level of contamination, as well as how to solve the slag material problem without transferring it to other municipalities and communities. This would disrupt the ecological balance in another area. This has already happened in the transfer of slag material to Biljane Donje, where it was declared as hazardous waste by the European Union. More recently, there was the case of the processing of this same slag material by the Kemokop company in Sisak. In discussions, the emphasis was put on the constant neglect of that space, which is claimed to be unusable or that it is desirable to be used most often for further touristification. Despite tens of millions of Croatian kuna (former currency, author's note) being paid by the City of Šibenik for the remediation of hazardous and non-hazardous waste, the land of the former Electrode and Ferroalloy Factory in Crnica has never been fully remediated. The question that naturally arises is: how is it possible that slag heap material processed in Šibenik is classified as an inert, harmless material, but when relocated to Biljane Donje it becomes hazardous waste, only to become harmless again in Sisak? The key question formulated during the Living Lab process is: what are the possible tools that could encourage the identification and resolution of problems of an alienated space that has been leveraged upon by different forms of administration while citizens were left out of the decision-making processes? The second main concern of the working group revolved around the issue of activating the wider community of Crnica, Šibenik, Šibenik-Knin County, and even the entire country, so that a similar problem would not be addressed in an inappropriate and irresponsible manner as has been the case with Crnica. Various participatory models for activating the wider community were considered, ranging from workshops and peripatetic formats for citizens to workshops with children, media campaigns, virtual archives, and communication on social networks. In conclusion, the goal set by the working group is not to solve the entire problem, which is too complex, but to encourage public discussion on the issue and raise public awareness through civic participation.[14]

14 From the official Commission document, signed by commissioners (members of Working Group Crnica), on 25 October 2025.



Public workshop “Around, about and apropos Crnica (Conversations about Crnica II)”, an aerial view of Crnica district, March 2026. Photo: B-forme (Lovro Vudrag) for AIIR



The Working Group (i.e. the commissioners) have also written down the essential aspects that the artist who would collaborate on the project should take into account:

> The artist is expected to contribute to the experience of the past and the imagination of the future of Crnica through artwork. The creation of the artwork should be processual and participatory, contributing to raising awareness among the citizens of Šibenik about the space of Crnica and its inhabitants, as well as to sensitising the wider public to the issues faced by the residents of Crnica, also of Biljane Donje, and, more recently, Sisak. During the production of the artwork, the artist will keep in mind the previous Living Lab process of reflecting on various themes within the working group. These could include the production of knowledge about the history of electricity production, electrification, deindustrialisation, and the decontamination of the Crnica area. These themes should also consider the political aspects of these processes, the potentially contaminating nature of the material deposited in Crnica and the village of Biljane Donje, as well as the historical imagination, and the location's urban development and planning. Furthermore, the working group focused intensively on the issue of how to involve the broader community in an artistic and participatory project in Šibenik with greater impact on the wider community (considering that potentially still contaminated material is planned to be moved to Sisak, which its citizens strongly oppose), and the group's desire is for such a process to continue further, in collaboration with the artist.[15]

After details of the commission were written down, it was my task as a mediator to propose the artist. I realised that the problem of Crnica was so complex that I dared to propose only one artist, Lana Stojićević, who had previously faced these frightening facts – as an inhabitant of Crnica. In 2015, Lana Stojićević produced her famous work *Crno Brdo* [Black Hill],[16] which tackled the problem of the remaining slag heaps. The art piece won numerous awards, and made people more aware of the injustice that was

15 *Ibid*.

16 "In 2010, approximately 140 000 tons of potentially hazardous waste from the former Electrode and Ferroalloy Factory (TEF) in Šibenik was dumped in the village of Biljane Donje. Imagining the black slag heaps as the surface of an unknown planet, this project deals with the impact that this artificial and dangerous postindustrial landscape has on both the village and its residents. The costume used in the photo performance is an interpretation of traditional folk attire with the mask representing apotropaic protection from the threatening landscape. The costume is covered in a local embroidery pattern (četverokuka) that symbolizes hope and protection", Stojićević, "Black Hill 2015".



Public workshop “Around, about and apropos Crnica (Conversations about Crnica II)”, an aerial view of Crnica district, March 2026. Photo: B-forme (Lovro Vudrag) for AIIR



The workshop for children “The City’s Costume Design” held by Lana Stojićević in the frame of the International Children’s Festival Šibenik and the second phase of the ALILAND project, June 2026. Photo: Goran Radošević

done to the villagers of Biljane Donje, where slag heaps from Crnica were partly transferred to. Soon after the artwork had been made visible across the mediascape in Croatia, the villagers sued the Government and won the case at the European court.[17]

> "What caught my attention to take part in this project is a great team of participants and an important location: this place has not changed for a lot of years, and it would be great to see how it becomes a place for new activities and active life of local people." (Tomislav)

In order to engage a wider citizenship of Šibenik but also the region and the whole Republic, we organised two public events under the title *Conversations About Crnica*. At the first event, Jasmina Šarić from Split and Maša Štrbac from Zagreb presented their experiences of working with citizens reflecting on their own immediate environment. Then, the journalist and resident of Crnica Davorka Blažević gave a lecture based on many years of research into the problems that residents of Crnica had been facing for the past several decades. Finally, the artist Lana Stojićević presented her works on the topic of Crnica and the Electrode and Ferroalloy Factory.[18] Simultaneously, we commenced planning the second phase of the ALILAND project, *Nature Based Solutions*, and we had the first meeting in December 2025.

The second event, *Around, About and Apropos Crnica (Conversations About Crnica II)* was a workshop designed according to the festival model and held in March 2026, conceptualised and designed by young experts in the fields of urban planning, architecture, and landscape architecture: Bruna Alfier, Katarina Nanjara, and Mate Rupić.[19]

17 Though the European Court ordered the Republic of Croatia to solve the problem of toxic waste in Biljane Donje in 2019, Croatia has not fulfilled its obligations, and at the moment it is not really clear how Croatia paying huge fines to the European Union actually repairs the community of Biljane Donje. For more details see: "Judgment of the Court (Seventh Chamber) of 6 March 2025".

18 More here: https://www.uiii.hr/exhibitions/razgovori-o-crnici1.

19 More here: https://www.uiii.hr/exhibitions/okopoiapropoCrnice.

By engaging citizens in these public events, we have been trying to build a path for the artistic intervention, that is, in one of its segments, also considered as a carnivalesque public parade – a form of inverting the power of the omnipotent (but very often abstract) investor into the hands of the citizenry. In other words: to make a place for more democracy in making decisions about the territory that belongs to all the citizens of Šibenik.

Engaging citizens in this process is seen as a form of building new relational economies in the city, economies that could foster a resilient Šibenik in the times ahead: times of certain climate changes, especially for Mediterranean cities.

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Art Living Lab to Repair the Land – Energy Aftermath

Alfredo Escapa Presa

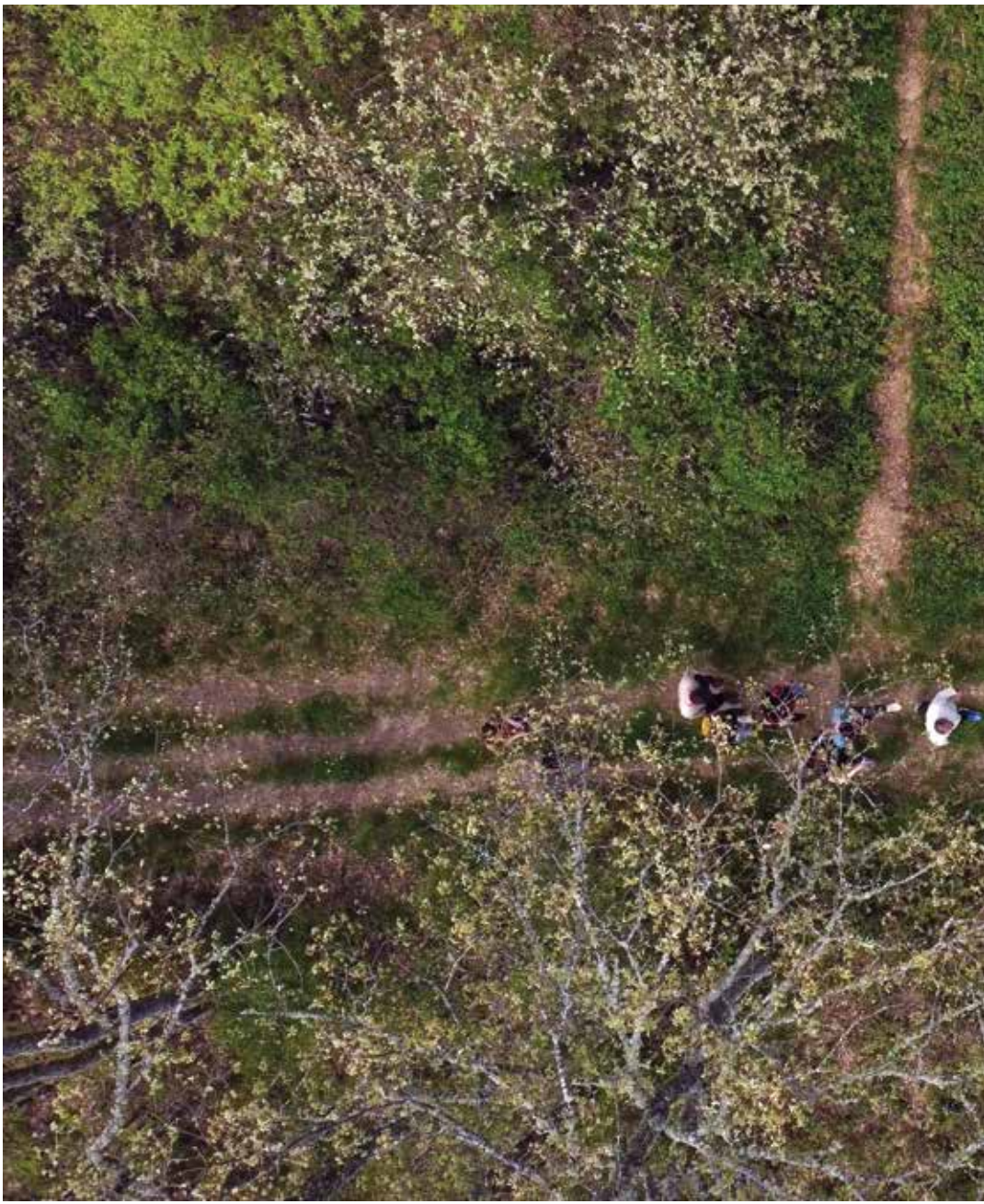
> *These sites will never again return to the way they used to be. But what they do offer to us is insight into the processes of reparation and adaptation, and — more valuable still — they offer us hope. They remind us that, even in the most desperate of circumstances, all is not yet lost.*
>
> (Flyn, *Islas del abandono*, 31.)

Barruelo de Santullán is located in the province of Palencia, Castile-Leon. It is one of the 184 municipalities in Spain currently undergoing a decarbonization process. These municipalities form part of the Just Transition mechanism, a Spanish and EU public policy aimed at promoting economic activity and employment opportunities in the move towards a green and low-carbon economy while minimising the negative economic and social impacts that can result from abandoning polluting industries.

This area is representative of the population flows seen in the vast majority of Spanish towns where mining was the main driver of economic activity. Before mining began, the town had had a population of around 40 people. At the height of employment in the mines there, the population was close to 12,000, making it the province's second-most populous town after the capital. Today, Barruelo de Santullán has approximately 1,200 registered inhabitants.

Another outstanding fact about Barruelo de Santullán is that early in the morning of 6 October 1934, a revolution began there. The Church of Santo Tomás and the town council building were burnt down, and a socialist Republic was declared. Many died in the struggle – including the socialist mayor – and the revolt was quickly and violently repressed by the army on 8 October. Due to its coal mines, Barruelo de Santullán had a very strong workers' movement and was considered a hotbed of Marxism.

This historical context gives a significant insight into what has been happening in this territory since coal mining began, as well as into the



View of the territory from the sky, May 2025.
Photo: Óliver del Nozal “Hammer Dron” for Concomitentes

restorative justice processes currently unfolding here,[1] which the local people want to place at the centre of this project.

The first time they enter the town, visitors are greeted with brutally evident wounds from the past. These scars — empty streets, abandoned and ruined houses, closed-down businesses and an industrial area shut off by imposing gates — were a constant topic throughout the working sessions. But on further, deeper analysis, we can detect another, less visible kind of scar in need of healing that can only be fully appreciated when you spend time talking with local residents. These are wounds that have more to do with a lack of care, affection and a feeling of exclusion from Spanish society. In the past, such scars made the community feel essential to Spain's energy supplies. But in the present, to paraphrase their own words, "they make them feel like debris". This idea of debris or waste became a recurring theme of the working sessions from early on in the process. When Jose Luís, chair of the Association for the Recovery of Industrial Heritage [ARPI, *Asociación para la Recuperación del Patrimonio Industrial*] and one of the participants in the initial sessions, brought up the term *islán*, from the mining jargon (known as *Schlamm* in German, *lodo* in Spanish, *tailings* or *slurry* in English), it became one of the fundamental terms running through this process. Geles, another of the participating residents, commented that "a large part of the town was built atop of debris from the mine". The concept of living beings' capacity to adapt when confronted with a disruptive agent or an adverse state or situation has been a common thread in all the work we have done so far in this territory. Working with the human, and trying to understand the scales of more-than-human. We also wanted to give sufficient weight to the importance of geology to this terrain, to the relationship that the population has been having with what lives on the surface, with what emerges from the depths and with what "inhabits" the subsoil.

There is a place in Barruelo de Santullán where all these layers coexist: the "Barruelian stratotype". A stratotype is the physical reference location where a unit or a chronostratigraphic limit is defined. It is an interval or a specific point within a sequence of strata that provides a pattern or type that can be used as a basis when defining, identifying or making comparisons with other locations. The complex structural framework of the La Montaña Palentina area, where we have been carrying out this mediation process, allowed us

1 In a restorative justice process, people involved in a past event collectively figure out how to deal with the consequences of the offence in question and its future implications. Victims play an active role in the process, while "offenders" are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and repair the damage they have done.



The group of commissioners in front of a mural in the centre of the town, February 2025. Photo: Alfredo Escapa Presa



One of the first Living Lab encounters, February 2025. Photo: Alfredo Escapa Presa

to observe in detail one of the most interesting Carboniferous stratigraphic records of the Palaeozoic period in the Cantabrian Mountains. But in our case, it also became a metaphor for the large number of overlapping layers of decarbonisation policies that coexist within the social and political networks of this territory.

> "I have a strong emotional connection to Barruelo de Santullán, and although I don't live in this village, my ancestors were born here. I really like the fact that this is a long-term project which listens to the local residents in order to create a piece of contemporary art. Through this work, I would like to foster a sense of cohesion, using a means that connects with the beauty and love for the past, present and future of this area." (Paula)

For these reasons, it was essential to work with the multiple meanings of the terms that emerged, focusing especially on two of the words that underpin this mediation: "repair" and "aftermath". If we had not delved into both, most likely the work we did would not have even scratched the surface of the problems nor the desires which the project's *comitentes* [commissioners] brought with them each day.

It was evident that the commissioners all had different perspectives on the meaning of these words. This meant that our first task at the initial working meetings was to agree on a common starting point so that we might build a community with enough agency to propose to the rest of the local residents an artistic piece that would overcome years of discouragement in a context of depopulation, lack of work and unfulfilled promises of progress.

"Repair" was the first word we had before us. The project commissioners talked about healing, reversing conflicts, taking responsibility, becoming aware of the people who preceded us, rehabilitating, learning and paying attention.



The site visit during the “Repair the Land” event, May 2025. Photo: Ana Escariz



The visit to the Mine Interpretation Centre (Centro de Interpretación de la Minería) of Barruelo de Santullán during the “Repair the Land” event, May 2025. Photo: Ana Escariz



The site visit during the “Repair the Land” event; family picture with commissioners and consortium members, May 2025. Photo: Óliver del Nozal “Hammer Dron” for Concomitentes





The first visit of the artistic collective Todo por la Praxis; the team posing in front of a ‘colomina’ (housing block for miners), December 2025. Photo: Óliver del Nozal “Hammer Dron” for Concomitentes



This first term led us to a speech by Idoia Zabaleta,[2] at the meetings organised by the Spanish Ministry of Culture in Navia (Asturias, Spain) in 2022, which served to question the group's understanding of this expression. Idoia said:

> While it doesn't sound excessively beautiful, 'repair' is a word that offers a three-for-one that helps me a lot. How do our neighbours in Portugal use the term? Firstly, it means repairing how we perceive, comprehend and realise what is happening. Secondly, repairing is understood from their perspective of looking at something again. When they say '*Reparan en eso*', it means 'Take another look at that'. Thirdly, repair means to heal or fix. Participating subjects have to continuously 'repair'; that is, stop to look again and, in doing so, notice what they are creating and generating collaboratively. [...] And with this I mean human subjects and non-human subjects [...] I mean the whole 'repertoire': people, spaces, buildings, squares, stories, liturgies, supplies, and so on. All of them are *the what* and *who* that are doing what is being done.[3]

"I wanted to take part in this project because I believe it is necessary to create a time and space that is welcoming to everyone." (Lourdes)

"I'm not from Barruelo de Santullán, but I've become involved in this project because of personal connections with one of the participants. I want what we do to be restorative for the whole area, and I'd like it to be shaped by knowledge." (Olga)

This three-for-one Idoia refers to, provides a framework for the different proposals we have worked on in an effort to ensure that the "repertoire" has enough agency to constitute more than just the landscape on which humans construct narratives.

Mila, another of the commissioners, made this clear when she brought us her grandmother's apron while working on the idea of giving voice to the land's

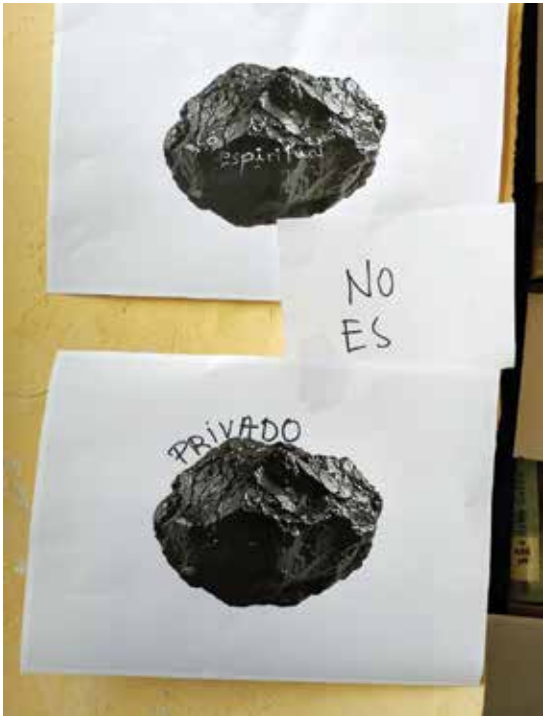
2 Basque choreographer and biologist specializing in ecosystems and population dynamics.
3 Ministerio de Cultura, "ECOSISTEMA." Author's translation.



A visit to the territory with the artists; former Civil Guard barracks, now abandoned, December 2025. Photo: Óliver del Nozal “Hammer Dron” for Concomitentes



A working session with the artists, December 2025. Photo: Óliver del Nozal “Hammer Dron” for Concomitentes



The working session on the exploration of citizen desire with Todo por la Praxis. Photo: Alfredo Escapa Presa

"other" (human or more than human). She wanted her grandmother's apron to take on the role of entering into dialogue with others. In addition to giving care duties a central role in a town where they were always on the periphery of a story whose main character was always the miner. This gesture allowed us to very clearly identify the agents who are currently operating in the public sphere, and ensure that it was not all about the heroic story of exclusively male underground work.

The other prevailing term in the mediation was *secuelas* [aftermath]. As another word with multiple meanings, it helped us further explore and understand many of the problems that permeate this place where mining has been and still is so present.

In *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, Ursula K. Le Guin says that "To make a new world you start with an old one, certainly. To find a world, maybe you have to have lost one. Maybe you have to be lost".[4]

> "I've been living in this area for the last three years, and what I seek in everything I do in the mountains of Palencia is to enrich myself both personally and as part of the community." (Clara)

> "More than half of Barruelo de Santullán is built on the rubble left behind by the mine whilst it was in operation." (Geles)

The commissioners were given a lost, abandoned territory with a multitude of scars present in marks, vestiges, remains and traces that give material form to some consequences, such as memory. These ideas emerged in the game of naming the "aftermath" from a personal perspective, but above all, in a debate in which this aftermath was named in terms that did not allow for shades of grey: it was positive or negative, visible or invisible, sentimental or material, physical or psychological, objective or subjective, and so on. This might seem a negative exercise at first, but it generated very fruitful debates.

4 Cited in Remaud, *Cuando las montañas bailan*, 7. Author's translation.



The working session on the exploration of citizen desire with Todo por la Praxis.
Photo: Alfredo Escapa Presa



Barruelo de Santullán Summer School: exploring the coal spoil heaps, 2021.
Photo: Rita Diez Estalayo

This duality mirrored the two worlds contained within mining (the surface and the interior of the Earth) and provided a solid basis for encouraging a dialogue with the territory. It was as if by digging into the darkness of the mines, we would unearth the fundamental concerns and issues that link the participants as a collective.

From this political positioning, where there was no room for a grey area, the participants launched into the debates that eventually led to the selection of *Todo por la praxis* (TxP) as the artistic collective that would give material form to their desires.[5]

Looking back at everything that happened on the path to choosing the artistic collective, I cannot help but think of a quote by Rebecca Solnit: "The response to disaster depends in part on who you are [...] but who you become is also an outgrowth of what you believe".[6]

> "I hope the project includes an element of restorative justice for all the silenced stories." (Raquel)

This group, made up almost exclusively of women, believes. Believes with all its might in the transformative energy of doing things together, that if people can position themselves politically, they will be the valid agents who help the land recover its dignity. This group believes that dissent is the only option they have to continue building life in their territory despite having been told that everything has already been extracted from it. Furthermore, the rejection of single-minded thinking is the only viable option if we are to begin repairing the most invisible aftermath, the secuelas, that persist in Barruelo de Santullán and other similar places.

For these reasons they chose TxP: partly because the themes of the artistic collective were twinned with their desires but also because the artists' main pillar of action is citizen activism in public and common spaces as an alternative to neoliberalism. Today, TxP focuses on dissidence as a political means of resistance to enable new imaginaries. Contained within their work — which can be leveraged to analyse current contexts from a mutant perspective — is the challenge of creating, addressing and welcoming radical discourses antagonistic to imposed hegemonic cultural values.

5 See the collective's webpage here: https://todoporlapraxis.es/.
6 Solnit, *Un paraíso en el infierno*, 94.



Aerial view of the coal spoil heap, 2023.
Photo: Óliver del Nozal “Hammer Dron” for Concomitentes



From lines of action rooted in collaborative practices responding to the needs of communities, TxP has advanced towards collaborative practices that use artistic processes in both geographical and symbolic territories to generate spaces for critical thinking, activating new cross-cultural subjective perspectives as a form of emancipation from – and decolonisation of – predominant ways of thinking.

This is the reason why, in the commission the group entrusted to TxP, the commissioners are first defined as

> inhabitants of Barruelo de Santullán and their descendants, many of them daughters and granddaughters of miners; inhabitants of the village, or their descendants who live in the vicinity of this place, all of them with a strong emotional bond with the territory. [...] daughters of coal and of the mountain. They want to find new ways of being in this land, with joy and hope for a future that advocates for them to remain here. The struggle that unites them has to do with recovering the common space of their memory [since] the memory of mining continues to leave a deep imprint on local life. The participants expressed that, although the mine had closed, stories silenced by omission from the official narrative of the territory persisted – in particular those of women linked to the mining activities. The community feels abandoned and unrepresented by recent *nature restoration* processes, leading to a sense of being part of the *debris*. Yet, it is on this very debris that they aspire to rebuild a renewed collective identity.

"Reparation means becoming aware
of the hands of those who came before us"

"Baskets, coal and tights!"

"Despair is working without nature."

"Mending the earth politically."

(Collectively created statements)

> Our main express desire is to create a symbolic and political space that contributes to restorative justice in the territory, gives visibility to these stories and generates advocacy capacity both locally and more broadly,



The coal spoil heaps at Barruelo de Santullán before their restoration, 2023.
Photo: Rita Diez Estalayo

> establishing as an essential prerequisite that the creative process both respects and incorporates the feelings, vulnerabilities and complexities that emerged during the mediation, and that it places the forgotten memories of the community in the foreground, with special attention to the stories of women.[7]

Barruelo de Santullán and the women who make up this group face a very great challenge, but as Olivier Remaud says, "Some territories are capsules of stories that can be short or long, but that are always intense. They bring together storylines that are scattered throughout the same dance, narrating partnerships and destinies".[8] Now is the time for the local residents to generate physical and emotional places where they can plot those storylines, where they can build new narratives rooted in feelings, with everything that makes up a territory.

7 From the official Commission document, signed by the commissioners.
8 Remaud, *Cuando las montañas bailan*, 67. Author's translation.

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02b

ART LIVING LAB TO REPAIR THE LAND

Citizens' Commissioned Artworks

The textual excerpts and images from the Artistic Dossiers
(final artistic proposals)

Agriculture Aftermath, Wietstock, Germany
(artist: **Antje Majewski**)
A GARDEN FOR PEOPLE AND BIRDS

Electricity Aftermath, Šibenik, Croatia
(artist: **Lana Stojićević**)
TOWARDS THE MANGAN CITY

Energy Aftermath, Barruelo de Santullán, Spain
(artist: **Todo por la Praxis**)
CUÉVANA

ANTJE MAJEWSKI
+ VILLAGE GARDEN WORKING GROUP

A GARDEN FOR PEOPLE AND BIRDS

Location: WIETSTOCK / ALTWIGSHAGEN

MEDIATOR: SUSANNE BURMESTER (Kunstverein Rügen e.V.)

Wietstock is in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, in an area that is already suffering from falling groundwater levels and increasingly dry summers.

Installing a well, for example, is technically very complex and requires constant maintenance. Therefore, it was proposed to view the entire garden to retain moisture in the soil by creating more shade. As a partially wooded garden with a layered arrangement of tall, shade-providing trees, shorter fruit trees, shrubs, and perennials, a microclimate is created that counteracts evaporation.

The site initially appears largely as fallow land overgrown with tall weeds. A pile of rubble containing asbestos debris must be disposed of properly. The ground is very uneven. Soil samples revealed good, nutrient-rich soil. The municipality of Wietstock/Altwigshagen had already built a playground on part of the site; there is also a seating area near the playground.

The Wietstock Garden Group's mission was to create a garden as a laboratory, a community project, and a place for the local exchange of knowledge. It is meant to be a place for children, for happy moments shared together that will be remembered later – a place shaped and cared for by everyone together. They envisioned flowing water as a symbol of "plants living together, but also of people from different backgrounds and with different ways of life."

The project "A Garden for Birds and People" interprets this mandate. All changes are discussed with the group and are either accepted, rejected, or modified by them. The project design is therefore not merely a draft but already incorporates the wishes and experiences of the garden group. This grassroots, participatory approach makes the project, from the very beginning, an endeavour that is not dictated from the outside but is developed locally and collaboratively. The community garden thus emerges

as a place that is not merely presented as a finished setting for a staged community, but rather, on the contrary, a place where community is created and deepened through shared work. This includes joint discussions and decisions, as well as work sessions, some of which require intensive physical labour on the site. As a result, the negotiation processes with the villagers are a central aspect of the artistic work for this project. It is open-ended, not object-orientated and develops within the negotiation process.

The project proposes dividing the garden into several areas. One area is particularly appealing to children (and others), who can play there and eat apples and other fruits. The wildflower meadow in the orchard is especially insect friendly. One area is intended for group activities: here, people can have barbecues, play games like bocce or badminton on a small lawn, sit together, and teenagers can hang out. Another area is designed specifically to attract birds and encourage them to use the garden. Since this area has denser undergrowth and a deadwood section, it is also home to other animals.

The Different Areas

a) A grove of apple trees featuring old local varieties, situated in a wildflower meadow.

b) An open area with a lawn that needs to be mowed and can be used for games. A sycamore tree and a group of wild apple trees provide shade.

c) A compost bin and a composting toilet are also planned for this area. This is necessary because access to the restroom facilities in the village hall is limited. If the garden is to be used at any time for community activities, as well as by children and teenagers, there must be an easily accessible restroom. The compost also provides valuable fertilizer for the fruit trees and fruit shrubs.

d) The existing playground with a seating area.

e) A brick fire pit surrounded by benches. The ground is paved. It offers space even for larger groups who want to enjoy a cozy barbecue.

f) A mosaic featuring animals and plants from Wietstock – which was created as part of a preliminary project – is to be relocated and rotated for the garden's redesign so that it is now visible from the fire pit and the garden.

In the future, it will be placed in front of the pavilion, which is yet to be built. A rainwater collection tank is also located here.

g) Behind the fire pit is an area specifically designated for birds. The trees and shrubs planted here provide food and shelter during the breeding season. A path leads into this somewhat wild area and to a metal birdbath shaped like a sunflower. The birdbath must be cleaned and refilled regularly. Bird feeders should be hung up.

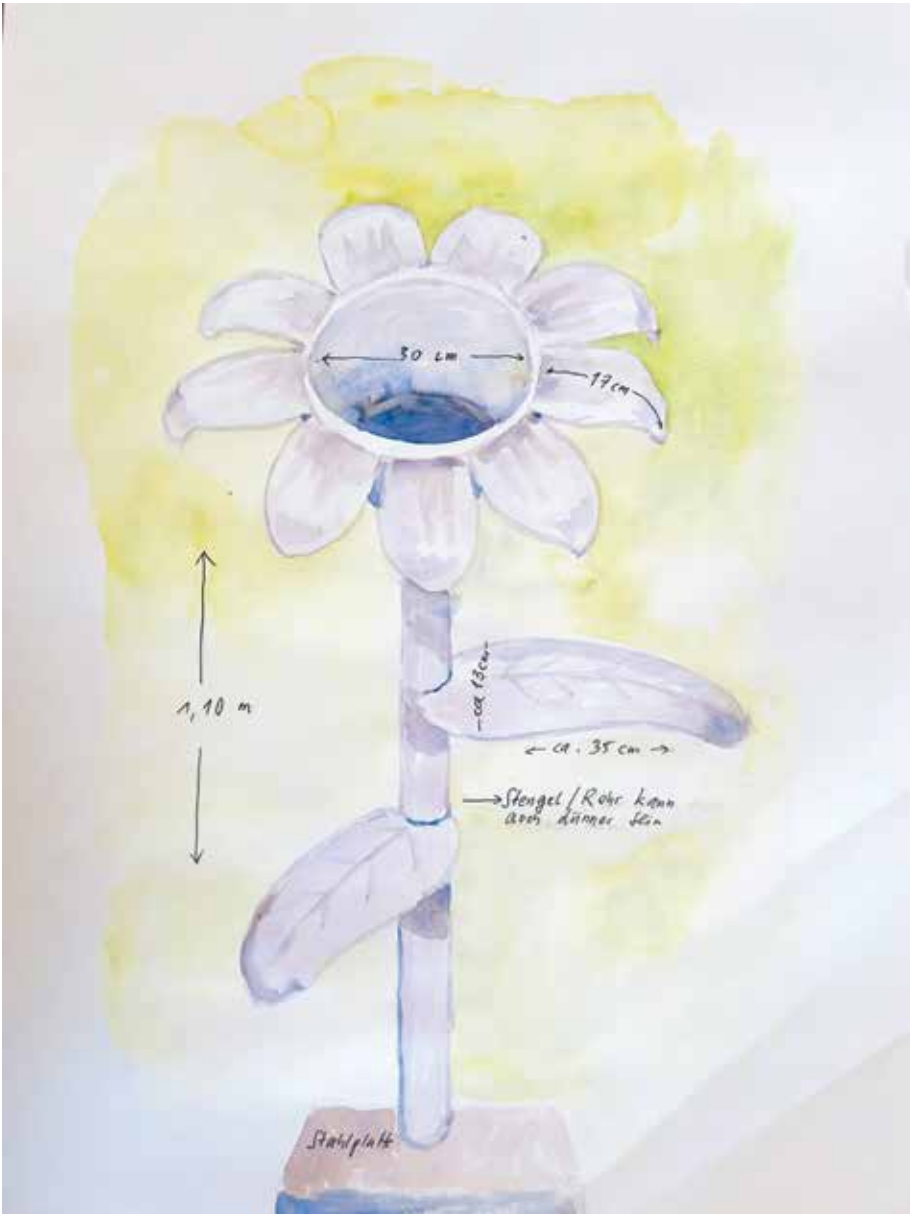
Part of the design consists of paths made of granite steppingstones that lead to the birdbath, though some of them also end in nowhere and serve only as ornamentation. The shape of these small paths is laid out on the ground by the garden group in the form of an ornament made of apples. I have already created these apple patterns in earlier projects, so here – and in the planting of apple trees in the garden – there is a connection to my long-standing project "The Apple. An Introduction. Over and Over and Over Again" (with Paweł Freisler). The execution will be based on the form spontaneously developed within the group.

Antje Majewski

https://artlivinglab.eu/blog/garden-for-people-and-birds



Planning of the Wietstock Garden. Design sketch by Ulrike Börst



Wietstock Birdbath. Watercolour Sketch by Antje Majewski



Wietstock Village Garden Working Group. Photo: Antje Majewski

Wietstock Village Garden Working Group. Photo: Antje Majewski



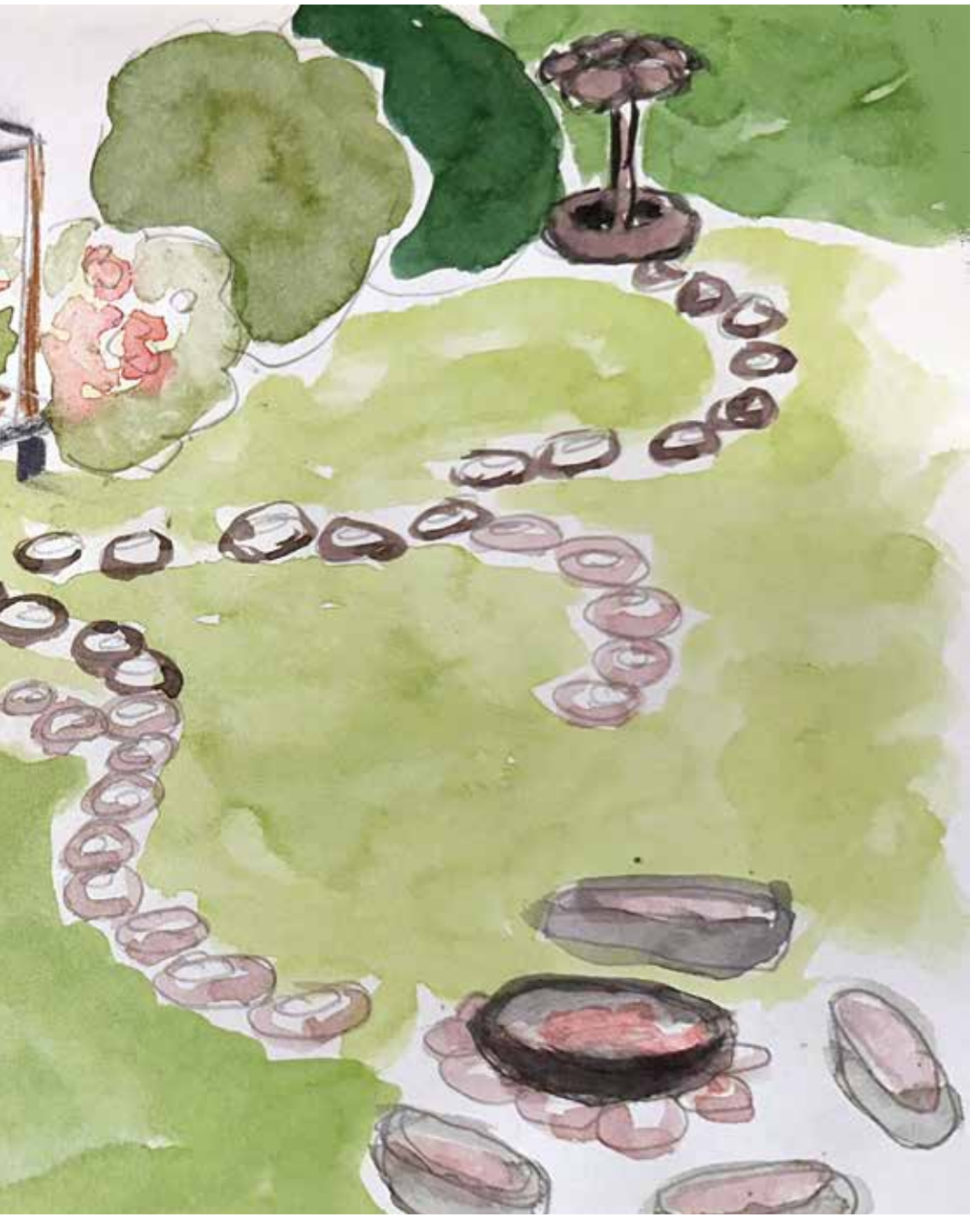
Wietstock Garden. Photo: Antje Majewski



Wietstock Garden. Photo: Antje Majewski



Wietstock Pavillon Path Design. Watercolour Sketch by Antje Majewski



LANA STOJIĆEVIĆ
+ WORKING GROUP CRNICA

TOWARDS THE MANGAN CITY

Location: ŠIBENIK, CRNICA

MEDIATOR: SONJA LEBOŠ (Association for Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Research)

“Ela, ela, Mangan City, mi smo momci ponositi. Od rođenja nosim manu što sam rođen na manganu...” / “Ela, ela, Manganese City, we are proud guys. Since birth I have been carrying the flaw of being born in manganese...” are the cheering lyrics from which I take the name of the project in the making. Manganese is a reference to TEF’s ferroalloys, ferromanganese and silicomanganese products, respectively. This term is also becoming an informal name for the slag that is constantly traveling, i.e. waste that, both literally with its volume, but also on a symbolic level, takes up space, enters homes and respiratory systems. The artwork is coming to being by interweaving documentary elements (such as archival audiovisual recordings) with costumed stagings in which I interpret the past, present and future of the TEF terrain.

While the conceptual framework, basic tone and narrative structure are defined, the final form will be further influenced by the fact that it is an interdisciplinary collaborative process, so that collaborators from different artistic fields will contribute to the project from the perspective of their profession, which is why they are given enough freedom to approach the process as a kind of experiment within a conceptually given framework. Through stagings in dominantly anthropomorphic and sculptural costumes that represent personified problems from social reality, I plan to present an alternative narrative about a real local problem in which certain universal principles can be recognized at the same time. The project narrative is primarily presented through a reinterpretation of key concepts and events related to the TEF/Black Hill cases: the theatrical demolition of factory chimneys, the inadequate and incomplete remediation of factory waste, or the unusual journey of the slag heap, the so-called Black Hill, and the speculative future of the TEF terrain.

The theatrical demolition of factory chimneys, documented by a carefully directed television reportage and accompanied by numerous spectators and applause, is being recreated by performers from the field of contemporary circus who will play the role of Chimneys on stilts, with an emphasis on perfecting the skill of falling, or demolishing factory chimneys. The journey of an artificial and dangerous landscape made of Šibenik's factory waste, as well as the threat to the population by the presence of this waste in the space, will be recreated by contemporary dance artists through choreographed associative movement in a costume in the form of the anthropomorphic Black Hill, suggesting the expansion of Mangan City.

The speculative future of the TEF terrain, as conceived by a contemporary performance artist, is being presented through the character of a fictitious Investor (capital letter intended, ed. note), who will present an architectural and urban project designed for the former TEF site.

With a touch of criticism, that fictitious project is inspired by the history of the location and previously unrealized plans for the area. From today's perspective, it is difficult to imagine that the dystopian landscape, which is mainly used by the local population for recreation and dog walking, will ever look different.

Towards the Mangan City, with an emphasis on processuality in the creation of the work, will be created in collaboration with artists from the fields of contemporary dance and contemporary circus, and with a contemporary artist who most often expresses himself through performance. It will be presented in a multimedia form that combines live performances, with an emphasis on sculptural costumes, with audiovisual elements. The audiovisual materials predominantly relate to a combination of documentary and archival records (e.g. a report on the demolition of factory chimneys from 1996 or a video from the family archive with footage of the yard and the house where I grew up on Prilaz tvornici Street), and documentation of performances/ costume stagings in spaces related to TEF and the waste generated in that factory. The introduction to the performance in the interior of the local institution will be a costumed parade in the public space of Šibenik. I consider the symbolic theatrical and performative relocation of TEF's Chimneys and TEF's Black Hill of slag to the very centre of the city an important gesture of the local population confronting the still current problem of the condition of the TEF grounds and the far-reaching consequences of this case.

In order to somehow involve the younger inhabitants of Šibenik in gaining consciousness of such an important topic for their future and the future of their city, workshops are organized and documented as a kind of expansion of the project among the younger population. The workshop for children has been included in the program of the International Children's Festival Šibenik through a competition. It was held in June 2026 with the assistance of a member of the Working Group Crnica.

Lana Stojićević

https://artlivinglab.eu/blog/towards-the-mangan-city



Neighbourhood of Crnica, Šibenik. Photo: Lana Stojićević



Neighbourhood of Crnica, Šibenik. Photo: Lana Stojićević

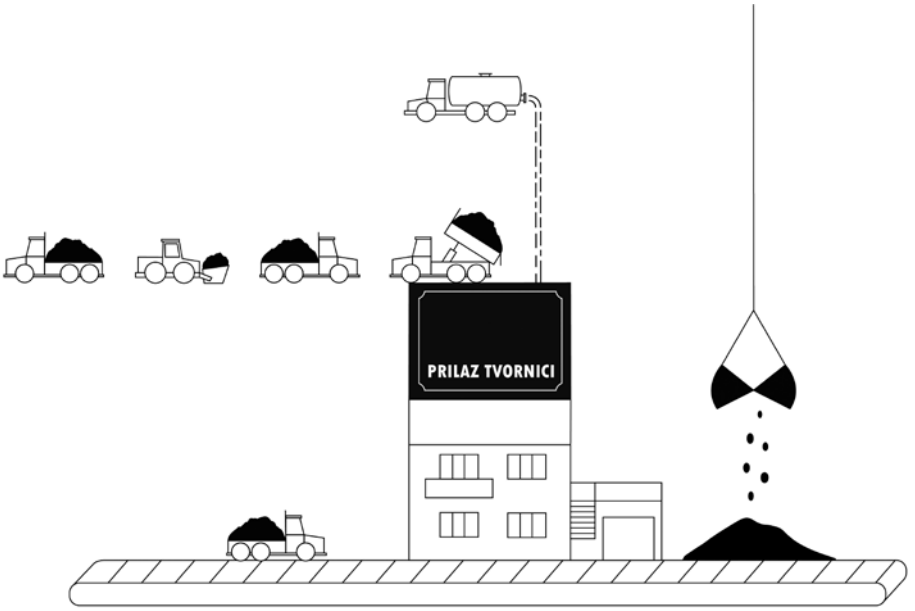




Neighbourhood of Crnica, Šibenik. Photo: Lana Stojićević



Piece of slag, neighbourhood of Crnica, Šibenik. Photo: Lana Stojićević



Digital drawings and collages by Goran Radošević and Lana Stojićević



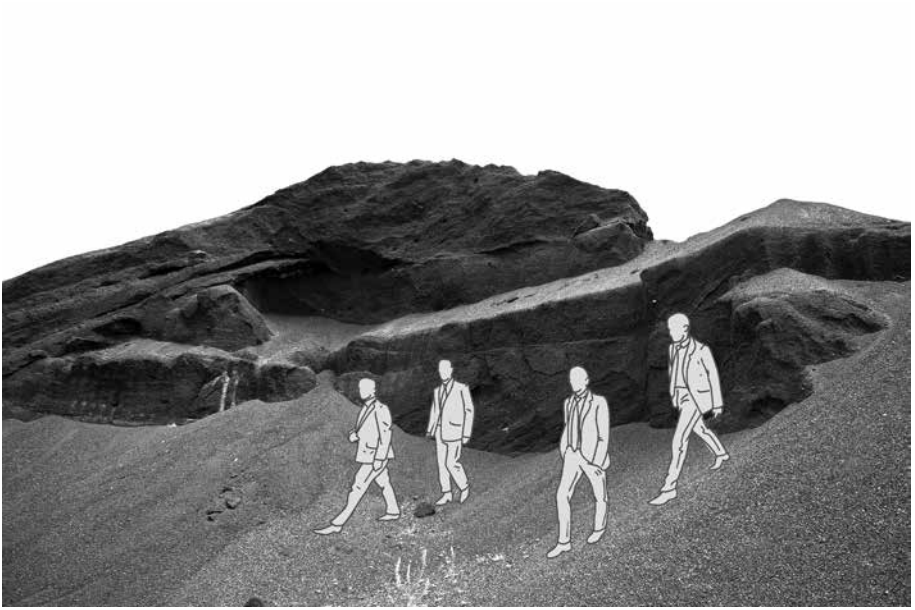
Digital drawings and collages by Goran Radošević and Lana Stojićević







Digital drawings and collages by Goran Radošević and Lana Stojićević



Digital drawings and collages by Goran Radošević and Lana Stojićević

TODO POR LA PRAXIS + WOMEN FROM BARRUELO DE SANTULLÁN

CUÉVANA

Location: BARRUELO DE SANTULLÁN

MEDIATOR: ALFREDO ESCAPA PRESA (Concomitentes)

Together, we have traced a series of concepts that needed to be reflected in the final work. From the conversations, walks and shared materials emerged the idea of an open, circular and welcoming space, conceived as a place for gathering, listening and dialogue. This circularity refers to the womb, the earth and the mouth of the mine, understood as spaces of interiority, extraction, support and survival. A container from which material is extracted, and from which life is also sustained. The structure takes the *cuévana* as its reference, derived from the *cuévano*, a handwoven basket used to collect coal from the spoil heap and to carry loads. The feminization of the name functions as a conceptual gesture that shifts the reference towards women's memory and towards forms of work that have remained outside the main narrative. This material image allows the piece to be linked to the gestures of carrying, containing, gathering and sustaining, actions historically associated with women's unrecognized labour. The circular, black and woven form alludes to the dark, damp and black mines, but also to the vein, the cracks and the spoil heap as a place of memory, a material residue of extracted earth and of a life organized around that extraction.

The construction of the weaving will also be a collective action. Over several days of work, the structure will be completed through an open process of weaving, encounter and conversation, where the materiality of the work will function as a pretext to continue activating stories, memories and bonds. Weaving the *Cuévana* will not simply mean resolving its final form but prolonging the process of dialogue that gave rise to the piece, incorporating the time of construction as part of its political and situated dimension. Within this same logic, the notion of care appears, understood not as an affective or submissive practice, but as infrastructure that made it possible to sustain the life of the town. Caring, raising children, feeding, teaching,

accompanying, working without recognition, sustaining homes, bodies and bonds appear as political forms of permanence. The piece proposes a circular route that invites us to enter this memory and to gather around images and texts that compose a history often displaced from the dominant mining narrative. Inside the *Cuévana*, the contents are organized into five symbolic strata linked to women, gender and memory. Political position, work, pleasure, the transmission of cultural memory and care. These strata function as layers of reading that make it possible to move through different dimensions of women's memory in Barruelo de Santullán, without reducing it solely to sacrifice, work or absence. The work also seeks to open space for enjoyment, desire, speech, cultural transmission and the forms of life that persisted both inside and outside the mine.

These strata are built through an ongoing process of collecting visual material. Women are contributing old photographs from their family and personal archives, while also taking part in portrait sessions focused on the palms of their hands. These images point to the lines of life as an intimate graphic trace of the individual memories that build collective memory.

The process also includes a visual record of contemporary trades and jobs carried out by women in Barruelo. Teachers, pharmacists, health centre workers, bakers, hairdressers and other figures from the town appear as part of a living memory, connected not only to the mining past, but also to the current ways of sustaining everyday life in the territory.

The concept of spectrality is also incorporated through the interior lighting of the *Cuévana*. The images appear under a warm light, like presences emerging from the darkness. This lighting refers to memories that come back, to what had remained out of frame, and returns to occupy a place in the common narrative.

Memory thus appears as an active presence, made of layers, apparitions and persistence, capable of disputing silence and opening space for an untold history. *Cuévana* is a circular sculptural intervention, 8 metres in diameter, conceived as a walkable space for gathering and memory. The structure is built from an iron skeleton that will be collectively woven with black hose-like material, generating a dense, dark and permeable outer skin. This skin wraps around the perimeter of the piece and, on the inside, descends approximately to half height, leaving the central void visible and allowing a relationship between body, movement, image and landscape.

The piece has two opposite openings that function as entrances and refer to the crack, the passage, the fissure and the mouth of the mine. Through these openings, visitors enter a circular route where the visual contents unfold in strata of memory. Images and texts printed on materials resistant to water, snow, cold and sun will hang from the woven section, designed to remain outdoors and to enter into dialogue with the conditions of the territory.

The interior floor will be made of slightly raised wood, creating a continuous platform that allows the structure to be walked through and inhabited. Mobile benches will be placed in the centre, so that the piece can also function as a place for gathering, conversation and collective activation. The work is conceived as a space that can be used, crossed and inhabited by those who took part in the process and by the community. A bell will be installed at one of the entrances, in reference to the bell that was once rung when someone from the town crossed the mining area and that disappeared some time ago. Its presence introduces a sonic dimension into the piece. The bell may be rung by those entering the *Cuévana* and will also sound with the wind, activating a fragile and persistent signal that accompanies the memories held within the structure. The inauguration is conceived as a nocturnal activation.

During this first opening, a video-mapping will be projected onto the hill of the spoil heap, with animated silhouettes of women carrying the *cuévano*, structures for transporting water and bundles of wood for the fire. These images will temporarily expand the piece into the landscape, making the bodies, gestures and loads that form part of the memory of the women of the territory appear on the surface of the spoil heap.

Todo por la Praxis

https://artlivinglab.eu/blog/cuevana/



Woman with a basket [Mujer con cuévano]. Photographic archive of Barruelo de Santullán



Hands of women from the Barruelo de Santullán region, shown inside the Cuévana.
Photo: Todo por la Praxis





Women carrying wood [Mujeres cargando la madera]. Photographic archive of Barruelo de Santullán



Hands of women from the Barruelo de Santullán region, shown inside the Cuévana. Photo: Todo por la Praxis



Interior of Cuévana, an artwork by Todo por la Praxis. Photo: Burru Comunicación



Inauguration of Cuévana, an artwork by Todo por la Praxis. Photo: Burru Comunicación



Teachers today. Photo: Todo por la Praxis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24 de junio de 2026



Silhouettes walking. Digital drawing by Todo por la Praxis



Shadows silhouettes. Digital drawing by Todo por la Praxis

03

THE NEW PATRONS: AT THE INTERSECTION OF THEORY, METHODOLOGY, PRACTICE

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Art Commissioned by Citizens

Alexander Koch

I.

The art world is undemocratic. The very social field that has, for two hundred years, claimed to be emancipatory and that played its part in the emergence of modern democracies, is not, on the inside, democratically organised. What becomes visible and what does not, what is commissioned, produced, and funded, who is included, who is left out: all this is decided in the art field by a small group of professionals – directors, curators, juries. They are professionally qualified, and rightly so. But what is their democratic mandate? Nobody has elected them, and nobody can vote them out. The art field reproduces itself out of itself, the maker of its own fortune. This is not a failure. It is the form in which the art field has been set up – only this form does not match what the field claims to stand for, and ought to stand for.

For a long time, this had no price. Today it does. Citizens are losing trust in their political representation, in parliaments, in parties, and in those who decide in their name. Art has little to offer in response to the crisis of representation – for it has its own. Its social legitimacy is itself in question. In what follows, I shall show why contemporary art is structurally complicit in the exhaustion of the democratic promise – and with it, of art's own emancipatory promise. And I shall show a way to push back, by taking the long tradition of citizen-commissioned art and thinking it through democratically.

The history of democracy is not over. On the contrary, seen against the long stretch of history, the democratic project is still young. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, it may seem to have left its best years behind. At the same time, many societies worldwide are in an ongoing process of democratisation or aspire to one. This gives reason to hope that, for many people still, a political order *of the people, by the people, for the people,*[1] remains the only prospect for *not being governed quite to that degree*[2] and for conducting their common affairs *as equals*.[3] Democratic awakenings and

1 Lincoln, "The Gettysburg Address".
2 Foucault, *What is Critique?*
3 Cf. Graeber, *There Never Was a West.*

the desire for self-determination are not a thing of the past. And they will not stop at the gates of the art field.

II. Who Ordered This?

In European history, art was, for the longest time, commissioned art. Paintings, frescoes, sculptures, pieces of music and theatre, buildings, parks, and gardens: all of it was commissioned. And it was made in the interest of the few. Only a small minority had the means and privileges to commission works of stature. The question of who was entitled to commission, and who was not, was always an eminently political one. Aristocracy and clergy were the old, classical commissioners, until new actors joined them: the bourgeoisie. Guilds, merchants, and municipalities fought their way into the role of commissioner, and through it forced new forms of representing power. In the Italian city-states, in the Dutch trading cities, in the free imperial cities of Germany, the base of those who decided on commissions kept widening. Anyone who has looked at Rembrandt's *Night Watch* is looking at a civic militia that commissioned its own monument — proportionately financed, collectively commissioned, with no higher power involved.

In parallel, artists themselves became emancipated and moved away from old commissioning relations towards individual freedom. Capitalism and bourgeois society found their representation in the independent artist, who produced works for the free market. Artistic autonomy became the leading paradigm of a subjectivity only based on inner necessity. Private and public commissioned art remained a source of income, but it was held in lower esteem, suspected of obsequiousness.

The modern venues of art — the museum, the art society, the gallery, the academy — were the stage for this paradigm. But they were something else as well: training grounds for democratic practice. Openings, coffee houses, the debates of the feuilleton, this is where the bourgeoisie constituted itself as a culturally judging subject. Here, it learned to hold an opinion and to defend it in public, even before it received the right to vote and had to become politically capable of judgement. A critical public sphere and democratic maturity were not to be had without art. Where art took place, democratic society-building took place too.

In the twentieth century, aesthetic autonomy found its institutional form in the White Cube — the empty, white exhibition space that rapidly became the global norm. White Cube, Black Box, the darkened cinema and theatre

auditorium, the concert hall – everywhere, spaces of self-reference came into being. And to the exclusion of everything else. What emerged was a system of cultural representation in which a professional class – artistic directors, museum directors, curators, juries – decided what would be shown, funded, and commissioned. And in which society, above all, did one thing: watch.

III. The Critique of Representation

However, to modernity belongs also the countermovement. It was, above all, artists themselves who chipped away at the legitimacy of the new structures – and the more resolutely so the more seriously they took the democratic project. DADA pitched itself against any official sense of institutional norm. The Russian avant-garde sought paths directly into the everyday life of workers and peasants. Reform movements went into nature, weaving art and ecology together. In the 1960s, the rejection of the standard model of art institutions reached its peak: too hierarchical, too male, too white, too far from the needs of society.

The problem was legible in art in public space too – commissions which were generally the responsibility of representatives of the same institutions. Try, by way of example, looking in the pedestrian zones of Western European inner cities for abstract sculptures made of steel and aluminium. And do not ask whether they are good art or not. Ask who commissioned them, and for whom. In Eastern Europe, it was different. There, commissioned art followed not the political programme of individual and artistic autonomy, but that of state-decreed solidarity. The concerns of the population were indeed at the centre of commissioned works, but as an advertisement for the inevitability of communism and socialism.

After 1989, the 1990s became the decade in which art was re-politicised. Picking up from the 1960s and 1970s, the social and the relational regained weight. Critique of representation and of institutions became tonal and altered the field. Remember the year 1990. It returns later in this text.

Today, in 2026, another half-era on, we live in art landscapes that have left many of these battles behind. Institutions have opened themselves up and have explicitly become sites of social diversity and participation. A private philanthropic sector has widened the spectrum of possibilities. Decades of effort, above all from artists, have borne fruit.

IV. Power and Spectator

Or have they not borne fruit? What is there to doubt?

Several things. The institutions have opened themselves outwards, but only on the surface. Programmes, themes, and faces have become more accessible; accessibility is written large; sometimes entry is even free. The decision-making structures behind them have hardly changed. Who sits on the juries? Who designs the programmes? Who distributes the funds and who awards the commissions? It remains, as before, a small group of professionals. What has become more diverse is the picture on the stage, not the power behind it. The group of those who have a say over directorships, programmes, and major funding decisions is manageable in size. It recruits itself, by and large, out of itself.

The private sector, for its part, has not solved this problem – only shifted it. The global art market, the great private collections, the corporate foundations, even the most well-meaning philanthropic projects: they have reduced art's dependence on the state and replaced it with another. Alongside expertise, it is now capital that decides. Anyone who has followed the past twenty years knows the movement: a private collection becomes a museum, a collector sits on a foundation board, a prize bears the name of a corporation. The privatisation of cultural decision-making power does not distribute power – it concentrates it. Citizens have not moved closer to the decisions; they stand further from them than before.

Who commissions art, who curates, where funding flows – all this is treated as a matter for experts. But it is a political matter. Where it is decided whose reality counts as worth representing and whose does not, one is operating at the very nucleus of the political. The de-politicisation of these decisions is itself a political act: it renders a historically grown distribution of power invisible, and so unassailable. Of course, experts decide – who else?

There are good reasons for entrusting such decisions to specialists rather than to elected representatives, who often do not know the field and tend to use art for their own ends. To protect the constitutional freedom of art is the duty of those who are qualified and competent to do so. But this arrangement has never been democratic. Political representation can be voted out, and it is publicly accountable – cultural representation is not. What has taken shape is a delegation of decision-making power to representatives without a mandate, who command resources and visibility, while the population

remains in the role of the spectator: a recipient, not an agent. In a word: as the powerless.

The cultural infrastructure that, at the beginning of modernity, once brought forth democratic maturity, today produces spectators. The political emancipation that, since the Enlightenment, drew ever wider circles and reached ever deeper depths, will no longer tolerate this delegation. It amounts to the curtailment of a power that, by definition, emanates from the people[4] – a people that today no longer wishes to be *governed quite to that degree*.[5]

V. The Crisis of Participation

The answer that the cultural field has found to this legitimacy problem is called participation. The social participation for which artists fought so long has become, for some, the DNA of their work. For others, merely good form. In funding applications, it has been promoted to a required quality – yet mostly understood quantitatively, as turnout, not substantively. And above all, participation, as it is mostly practised today, operates within the very structures it was meant to correct. Institutions whose legitimacy has entered crisis write Participation, with a capital P, on their banners, give themselves a more open face – and then themselves define what participation is to mean, where it is permitted and where it is not, who is invited, and to what. They control the space they open. This is not ill will. It is the logic of a system that does not understand its own decisions as political – and that therefore cannot see that its participation does not answer the question of power but evades it.

People notice this. *I hope you're not yet another participation project — we've had quite enough of those*. I have heard this sentence repeatedly myself, only recently. The people who say it are alert, often engaged citizens, in structurally weak regions, in villages, and in train station districts. They speak without rancour, more wearied than anything, almost melancholic. It led me to formulate a polemical, slightly malicious definition of what they mean.

4 Such is the wording of the German Basic Law. I prefer to speak of "population" rather than "the people", even though this term too is not without difficulty. Contrary to my intentions, it suggests a large group of human beings to be governed and administered, and a homogeneous community rather than a multiplicity of divergent classes and milieus. The neighbouring term "civil society" is no real alternative either; it refers to organised citizenship, not to all who live on a given territory.

5 Foucault, *What is Critique?*

Participation: behavioural containers dropped in from above, in which citizens are staged.

When I quote this definition, people tend to laugh and nod. And then one can begin to talk in earnest.

What this laughter expresses is anything but harmless. When people repeatedly experience that participation is offered but not meant, they stop believing in participation – and not only in the cultural variety, but in participation as such. The mistrust that failed participation breeds does not stay confined to the cultural field. It seeps into people's relations to their institutions overall – to politics, to democracy. Anyone who has been invited to speak three times and has not been listened to becomes receptive to those who say: these institutions do not represent you. In this way, the well-meant and badly executed participation of the cultural field plays into the hands of those forces that want to abolish democratic institutions, not reform them.

In art, methodologies play an even greater role than in politics: how something is done determines what comes of it. This applies to participation too. One has to draw a precise distinction here. *Participative* is a project that invites people to contribute to something devised by others. The frame is set, the questions are formulated, participation is provided for – welcome to the container. *Participatory* process is a process in which decision-making power itself is shared. Not contributing but co-deciding. Not taking part but having a part. Not joining in but bearing responsibility. Most art and cultural programmes that today put their faith in participation are participative. Very few of them are participatory. The step that historically stands before us – towards participatory democracy[6] – they thereby miss.

VI. On Behalf of the Population

If the representative model of cultural decision-making has entered a legitimacy crisis that is not solved but reproduced by participative formats, then the question of alternatives is unavoidable. Historically, the direction is clear. History shows a movement that, across centuries, has drawn ever wider circles of the population into decisions that concern them – towards more emancipation and, finally, democratisation. Each step on this path was

6 Political science has unfortunately established the term *participative democracy* where it ought to mean *participatory democracy* – i.e. the actual transfer of decision-making power. Specialistic and everyday usage alike fail to draw the distinction clearly enough.

felt by the ruling elites as overreach or as danger. Each prevailed in the end, because the pressure of legitimacy on the established order had become too great. There is no reason to suppose that the cultural sphere will be exempt from this dynamic. On the contrary, precisely because every community shares a symbolic order – otherwise it would not be a community – the question of who decides over that order has become a political question of the first rank. That it could be treated as a matter for experts for so long has a single reason: there was no model, no tool, that would have made another answer possible.

What citizens lack in their relation to art is not opinion, taste, or interest. What they lack is the right to act for themselves – on a field that directly concerns them. But in what capacity, with what competence? Not everyone is, or can be, an artist, curator, or critic. The abolition of expertise solves nothing – experienced people of the art world know what art can do, and this knowledge is irreplaceable. Nor is subjecting aesthetic processes to a majority vote an option – art is not a ballot. And mere joining in does not do the matter justice, as we have seen. How, then, can citizens enter the field of art as equals, take their place alongside artists and curators, cultural officers and museum directors, and co-govern? After everything that has preceded, the answer suggests itself: as commissioners.

Whoever commissions a work needs to know, above all, one thing: why it is needed. Whoever builds a house, commissions an architect. One does not have to understand architecture to be a builder – and yet one decides everything that matters. One names the need, chooses a style, prefigures the lived space, the relation of inside to outside. One decides where it is worth spending more, and where to save. Anyone can be a commissioner. Anyone who can articulate that something should be done.

The commission, as we have seen, is one of the oldest forms of the bond between art and society. Cathedrals, frescoes, tombs, operas, theatre pieces – almost the entire history of art before the eighteenth century is a history of the commission. Within it, there was a relation between those who named the need and commissioned the work, and those who answered and carried it out. In modernity, this relation was lost. To be sure, anyone who had the means could now be a commissioner, which applied to few. But to the general body of citizens, the new sovereign, the role of commissioner was never granted. Was this because they were not trusted with it? Certainly. But also, because there was a lack of imagination and courage to alter the established order. And finally, because the cultural elites had little interest in sharing their

capital.[7] The result is a systemically programmed-in democratic deficit of relations.

This deficit can be overcome. It is time. In the age of democracy, and all the more so on the path towards a democracy of participatory sense and shape, citizens must be granted the institutional right to commission art. Not as an exception, not as an experiment, not as a gesture of opening – but as the normal form of the relation between society and art. As something self-evident. States and institutions must learn to set up and to maintain the structures for this: art commissioned on behalf of the population. Art commissioned by citizens. Not art *for* citizens. Not art *with* citizens. But an art that comes closer to the ideal *of the people, by the people, for the people* than anything we have had so far. The consequences would be vast. For commissioned art is – even if it stands somewhat in the shadow of broader attention – to this day, one of the great sectors of cultural production.[8]

VII. The New Patrons

The good news: art commissioned by citizens *as a general principle* does not need to be invented. It already exists in the shape of a working model that has been in practice since 1991. The date can be given so precisely because this model did not emerge gradually from existing structures and does not rest on the insight of politicians. It goes back to an almost incidental historical moment. In 1989, Bernard Latarjet, the new director of the Fondation de France, brought the Belgian artist François Hers to the foundation as an adviser. Hers had become known for conceiving and implementing new forms of relationship between society, artists and their works.[9] In 1990, in a window after 1989 when new things seemed possible, Latarjet asked him for an idea of how the foundation could strengthen the social function of art and respond better, in the field of culture, to people's real needs. Hers's answer was his Protocole des Nouveaux Commanditaires, the protocol of the New Patrons: a model for action on a single A4 page that enables citizens to become patrons. "It offers anyone in civil society who so wishes, without exclusion and

7 Cf. Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*.

8 In Germany, several hundred million euros are spent each year on commissioned art – by federal, state, and municipal authorities, public-law foundations, and private commissioners taken together. With few exceptions, the disposition of these funds is decided by no one to whom the citizens have given a mandate.

9 From 1984 to 1989, Hers conceived and directed what became one of the most important public commissions in the history of photography: the Mission Photographique de la DATAR, the French interministerial delegation for regional planning.

in any place, alone or together with others, the means to take responsibility for commissioning a work from an artist." From 1991 onwards, the idea was put into practice: a new funding programme allowed the initiative for artistic projects to come no longer from institutions, markets or patrons, but from local communities. Soon after, the first works commissioned by citizens were created in Burgundy.

The protocol is interesting in several respects. I confine myself here to its methodological core. Hers understood that a bridge between citizens and artists does not arise by itself. For any person, any group, to be able to act as a responsible commissioner, and for artists at the same time to remain doing what they do best, a structure was needed — one that works for all without preconditions and that orchestrates the interplay of the two sides. The protocol is this structure.

Hers's most important invention is the role of the mediator — a specialist in art, capable of setting up and carrying through ambitious projects reliably. At the same time a figure who recognises and supports civic initiative, and who translates needs from the population into a consideration of the possible that awakens artistic competence and passion. In this function, mediators move between three worlds: they are catalysts of, and companions to, civic initiatives, sparring partners to the artists who engage with them, and guarantors towards funders, administrations, and partners of cooperation. Above all, however, mediators represent the interests of those who issue the commission, and protect its integrity, for instance, against encroachments from politics or institutions.

We call this figure mediator, in German as in English, following the protocol of François Hers and a French conceptual tradition. This has little to do with mediation in the sense of conflict resolution, and just as little with art mediation in the sense of museum education. *Médiation* denotes a productive movement in which two sides enter into a relationship and bring forth a third, which would not exist without that movement.[10] It is, in other words, a processual concept. In our case, the public and art enter into a relationship, and the third is the work that arises from both the citizens' commission and the artistic act. Mediation, in this sense, is not the mediating between things already existing, but the bringing-into-being of a relation that did not previously exist. The production of a work through relational work. It creates

10 Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1807, Preface; on médiation in the sense of the Protocol: François Hers, *Lettre à un ami*, 2016.

a field of its own – of social, cultural, and democratic infrastructure – that reaches well beyond the mediating activity itself.[11]

Whoever takes my polemic against participation containers seriously will now ask: is Hers's protocol not itself such a container? Does it not place citizens within a given frame, define roles, prescribe procedures? The answer is no, and the difference is decisive. A behavioural container prescribes *what* is to be done – it determines themes, contents, timeframes, aesthetic outcomes. The protocol does the opposite. It does not prescribe what; it makes a proposal for *how* a relation between citizenship and art can come about – through the figure of the mediator, in concert with funders and institutions. Everything else remains open: the themes, the places, the timeframes, the artistic forms. Who does what, with whom, to what end and in what shape, is decided in the commission itself. The analogy is not the container; it is the constitution. A constitution prescribes how one votes, not whom one is to vote for. It establishes a frame that makes the political possible, without determining it. This is precisely what the protocol does for the art field: it makes the citizens' commission possible, without determining it.

It has become a success – with limitations. In various regions of Europe, independent actors have, over the past thirty-five years, taken up the model, adapted it for themselves, and developed their own practice of mediation. Today, there are organised structures in seven European countries; in the *Société internationale des Nouveaux Commanditaires*, they have joined forces across borders, in order to represent together the idea and the ethos of art commissioned by citizens. Since 1991, around six hundred projects have been commissioned across Europe; as of May 2026, some eighty are in development. The trend is upward. Well over one hundred million euros have been invested in them. For the emergence of this movement, the *Fondation de France* was decisive: it provided start-up support outside France too, into the 2020s, with François Hers playing a continuous key role.[12]

In thirty-five years, this movement has grown into a decentralised network of independent actors across Europe, supported by foundations, municipalities, national associations, and the perseverance of around eighty mediators who run and develop the model professionally. What this movement lacks is not

11 The practice of médiation was first tested in France from 1991 onwards and has been increasingly professionalised since. It has become a profession in its own right, underpinned by corresponding training formats, though yet without formal recognition.

12 In Germany, it was above all the Kulturstiftung des Bundes that funded the New Patrons; in Spain, the Fondation Carrasso. Belgium, Italy, Croatia, and Switzerland in turn have their own multi-stranded financial models.

the proof that its model works – that has been delivered six hundred times over. What it lacks is a firm place: in public cultural budgets, in the funding channels of states and regions and municipalities, and in institutional matter-of-factness. What is missing is the political will – not for a revolution, but for an overdue correction of old structures.

VIII. Outlook

This brings us back to the actual political question. The question of cultural resources and the disposition over them. Which forms of cultural production does a polity recognise as a common task and which does it leave to the market or to private foundations? This is not an administrative question; It is a constitutional one. Financing art commissioned by citizens privately is a contradiction in terms. Art on behalf of the population is a public task. It is time to treat it as such.

Important European foundations and a large number of public bodies have made possible a more than thirty-year pilot phase. What stands open now is consolidation, and it requires less than one might suppose: hardly any new structures, only the opening of old ones. The houses are there. The budgets are there. The procedures and competencies are there. What is lacking is solely the decision to let a portion of them be programmed through citizens' commissions. This is not in addition to the existing cultural order, but as its participatory-democratic supplement. It costs little money and little effort, but something that weighs no less heavily: the willingness to share decision-making power.

The consequences and applications are evident. Where a commission decides on art-in-architecture, the future users could issue the commission. When millions flow into art in public space, citizens' commissions could take the place of jury decisions. Where mediation and cultural education are funded – in fields that have long stood close to the work of *médiation* – it is only a small step to the commission. The private sector, too, can share rather than dictate: foundations, patrons, and corporations that no longer set themes and formats themselves, but leave to citizens the decision of what is needed. Even major exhibitions can be approached differently. In 2018, I was proposed as artistic director of documenta 15. I put before the selection committee a concept they took seriously, but it was still too early for such a step. Perhaps it will come at some point: *the next documenta will be commissioned by the people*.

None of these calls for new institutions. All of it calls for the same decision: to give up something of what one has so far kept for oneself. Over centuries, the relations of commissioning mirrored the distribution of power and resources in European societies. In them, a successive emancipation from autocratic modes of rule could be read. Today, they reveal an outdated form of representation. It is to be renewed. In the long tradition of the citizens' commission within European culture, the next step now stands before us. Smart and viable concepts are needed to slow the re-feudalisation and disruption now spreading, and to democratically build an art of civil society. Who, if not the citizens – the sovereign – should play the leading role in this?

If the friends of liberal democracy do not make the necessary corrections to the existing system, its enemies will.

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Repairing Postsocialist Territories: Chronology and Methodological Insights from the Croatian New Patrons Platform

Kristina Leko

Introductory Notes

The objective of this text is twofold: first, to document the development of the *Novi naručitelji HR* [New Patrons Croatia] collaborative platform, and second, to contextualise and interpret this development — that is, to situate the implementation of the New Patrons model within the specific Croatian context. At the same time, the text reflects on the methodological implications of this process.

Particular attention will be given to the strategies and methods developed within the collaborative platform to collectively support and improve our individual projects, since I believe that it is precisely in this segment that we have made a methodological contribution. Finally, insofar as the insights available allow, I would like to consider how this implementation of the New Patrons model in a postsocialist setting might differ from its development in other countries.

The evolution of the model in Croatia can be divided into three distinct phases: a phase of preliminary research, international exchange, and the establishment of the collaborative platform (2019–2022); a phase of collective learning within the platform's network and the initiation of projects following the model (2023–2024); and a recent phase of institutional positioning and project implementation (2024–2026). This division serves primarily as an orientation for the discussion that follows, while a detailed chronological overview of key events is provided as an appendix.

I write this text from the perspective of one of the platform's two initiators. My colleague Maša Štrbac and I are both members of the artistic organisation *Otvoreni likovni pogon* [OLP, Open Art Drive], which coordinated the *Novi naručitelji HR* platform until the end of 2024. In preparing this text, I draw primarily on previously published texts by the organisation, documentation of implemented programs, and internal documents of the collaborative platform discussed here.

A Specific Point of Departure

I believe that the interest of our organisation and our partner associations and artistic organisations in the New Patrons model stems from the particularities of the Croatian postsocialist and post-war context, marked by prolonged economic crises, ideological divisions, and weakened public trust in the citizens' own capacity for civic action. I will therefore briefly outline the context in which we, within the organisation *Otvoreni likovni pogon*, turned to the New Patrons model.

Within the independent cultural scene, there had already been several years of interest in grassroots initiatives in the field of memory culture. Our 2018 project, which focused on researching civic initiatives in the Šibenik–Knin County, formed part of this broader programmatic and theoretical interest. For more than a decade, public discourse had also been marked by tensions between civic and veterans' commemorative initiatives, on the one hand, and art historians and other cultural professionals, on the other. While a smaller number of newly erected monuments rightly provoked criticism due to historical revisionism and the rehabilitation of fascism, others were criticised by cultural professionals for different reasons. Some experts publicly reproached such initiatives for their alleged bad taste, lack of education, bypassing prescribed procedures, and for failing to involve professional expertise. The public discrediting of citizens as incompetent and uneducated in matters of commemorative practice by cultural professionals certainly does not constitute a desirable form of public dialogue; rather, it reveals a structural gap between the two parties.[1] It was precisely within this constellation that the New Patrons model appeared to us as a possible framework for what François Hers has described as exercising democracy: a model in which the cultural worker — that is, the mediator — connects citizens and artists, encourages dialogue, and facilitates the collective shaping of public space and discourse, with art acting as a competent and effective ally of democracy.[2]

1 In the 1990s, during and after the Croatian War of Independence, socialist monuments, as well as antifascist monuments commemorating World War II and the People's Liberation Struggle, were systematically destroyed by self-organised individuals and groups with the approval of some right-wing politicians. This was followed by significant interest in the Yugoslav socialist memorial heritage on the international cultural and artistic scene.

2 Hers, "New Patrons / A History", 24, 33.

Preliminary Research, Exchange with *Neue Auftraggeber*, and the Decision to Establish a Collaborative Platform (2019–2022)

In 2019 the OLP established contact with the German branch of the New Patrons network, *Neue Auftraggeber*, which at the time was implementing a five-year pilot project in both western and eastern federal states, supported by substantial funding from the German Federal Cultural Foundation. During 2020 and 2021, an intensive online professional exchange took place, in which our German colleagues generously shared their knowledge and experience with us. Particularly relevant to us were the experiences from eastern Germany, a region marked by postsocialist challenges similar to those we encounter in Croatia, such as deindustrialisation, outmigration, social fragmentation, and ideological divisions. Based on this exchange, an analytical report was produced for the Croatian professional community that systematically presents the model, examines projects from different countries, analyses the German organisation and programme in depth, and considers the possibilities for its implementation in Croatia.[3]

In reflecting on how the model might be adapted and implemented, two key questions emerged. The first concerned the very fact of introducing a methodology developed in a so-called Western context, which, in conversations with actors within the local cultural scene, emerged as a point of concern and critical debate. The second question related to the choice of an appropriate format of implementation. In the case of a participatory model such as the New Patrons model, we felt that it could not be developed solely through professional networking and institutional channels, but required opening the process towards local communities and actors from different regions. Based on these insights, we decided to adopt a participatory platform format that brings together organisations from across the country to collectively develop the model's application in Croatia.

The format of a collaborative network of organisations is one of the programme formats supported by two national foundations that fund the development of civic initiatives, a point to which I will return later. The way in which we used this format to develop the New Patrons model may be understood as a specific methodological contribution. At the same time, however, one may ask whether by doing so we may have placed too strong an emphasis on participation and thereby influenced the profile of the projects that would later emerge from the platform.

3 UO Otvoreni likovni pogon, *Novi naručitelji u Hrvatskoj – Model demokratizacije umjetničke produkcije u javnom prostoru i prostoru zajednice i njegov potencijal u Hrvatskoj.*

The report was published and presented in 2022, shortly before the establishment of the collaborative platform Novi naručitelji HR, which the publication itself helped to initiate. Through the report, we issued an invitation to the Croatian professional community and to cultural activists to participate in the joint development of guidelines for adapting the New Patrons model to the local Croatian context — a process that was realised one year later.

Collaborative Platform and its Organisational Landscape

The platform was jointly founded by thirteen independent organisations and seven public institutions (museums, municipal galleries, and a public library), with five additional organisations joining during the first months of its operation.[4] In presenting the report, we emphasised that Croatia possesses a highly skilled and experienced independent cultural sector which, with the support of public institutions, could generate a national network of New Patrons and make a significant contribution to the democratisation of society.[5] It is important to note that the introduction and implementation of the New Patrons model in Croatia has taken place primarily within the landscape of the independent civil sector — a well-connected national network of NGOs, some of which, together with non-profit artistic organisations, are also engaged in cultural production. Actors within this scene are generally highly educated individuals of left-leaning political orientation who are committed to developing a democratic culture and who,

4 The platform's founding members and participating organisations during 2023 included: Atelieri Koprivnica; Art radionica Lazareti, Dubrovnik; Avanti!, Zagreb; BLOK – Lokalna baza za osvježavanje kulture, Zagreb; Centar za ženske studije, Zagreb; Galerija Galženica, Velika Gorica; Gimnazija Požega; Gradska knjižnica Požega; Gradska galerija Sikirica, Sinj; Gradska galerija Striegl, Sisak; Gradski muzej Varaždin; Gradski muzej Vinkovci; GOKUL – Građanska organizacija za kulturu, Zabok; KA-MATRIX, Karlovac; Labin Art Express XXI; Muzej Brodskog Posavlja, Slavonski Brod; Muzej grada Zagreba; Muzej likovnih umjetnosti, Osijek; Otvoreni likovni pogon, Zagreb; Culture Hub Croatia – Platforma za edukaciju, kreativnost i poticanje razvoja kroz kulturu, Split; Polygon – Centar za istraživanja i razvoj projekata u kulturi, Zagreb; Porta – Obrazovno-kulturna udruga, Knin; Slobodne veze, Zagreb; Association for Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Research (AIIR), Zagreb; Ured za fotografiju, Zagreb.

5 In this context, artistic organisations represent a specific, perhaps even unique, legal form: nonprofit NGOs engaged in artistic activity, introduced in 1996 as a support measure within the framework of the *Law on the Rights of Independent Artists*. A portion of associations active in the fields of culture and the arts receive support from the National Foundation for Civil Society Development, established in 2003. Another group of associations and artistic organisations is funded by the Kultura nova Foundation, also a state foundation, established by a special law in 2011 through a bottom-up process initiated by actors of the independent cultural scene, who initiated collaboration with state institutions in drafting the legal framework that ultimately led to the foundation's establishment.

particularly in smaller communities, often operate in opposition to local authorities.

In establishing the platform, we also opted for an intersectoral approach, as we wished not only to affirm and mobilise the professional capacities of the independent cultural sector but also to potentially create better production conditions for future projects through networking with public institutions. Observing the implementation of the model in other countries, it seemed that intersectoral collaboration offered the greatest potential, especially given the limited funding available for artistic production in Croatia. The French case served as an inspiration, as in France, some mediators within the New Patrons model are employed in regional contemporary art centres (*Fonds régionaux d'art contemporain, FRACs*), which provide a basic institutional structure for initiating projects. In practice, however, it proved difficult to implement such a model in Croatia. Museums are generally not willing to make programmatic commitments, while curators are often overworked. In this respect, collaboration with municipal galleries proved more effective, as these allow curators greater autonomy. At the same time, we believed that involving public institutions could provide the model with greater visibility and institutional legitimacy.

The Platform as a Collaborative Research and Learning Laboratory (2023 – 2024)

During 2023, regular monthly online meetings brought together twenty-five member organisations — including associations, artistic organisations, museums, one municipal library, and one educational institution — from different parts of Croatia. The meetings focused on familiarising participants with the methodology of the New Patrons model, analysing their respective local contexts, mapping local potentials, and exchanging experiences in working with communities, all with the aim of collectively adopting the methodology and initiating projects in a number of local settings.

The process began in January 2023 with an introductory online meeting. Local practices of working in public space were presented by participants in February and March, while a detailed analysis of international project examples, as well as of the *Protocol* — that is, the principles and roles that structure the model — was presented by the coordination team.[6] This phase laid the groundwork for the future by establishing a shared

6 Hers, *The New Patrons Protocol*.

understanding of terminology and processes. From March to June, member organisations analysed the contexts in which they operate. Each organisation presented their local themes, which spanned environmental issues, political and ideological divisions, inclusion, migration, and children's rights, among others. They also presented potential commissioning groups, and previous experiences with participatory work, followed by discussion and peer-to-peer written and oral feedback from the other members. The coordination team developed simple digital tools to structure these presentations and to facilitate the recording of feedback and the exchange of perspectives, thereby promoting the concept of collective learning. The aim was to identify or generate project initiatives according to the New Patrons methodology.

Over the course of the year, several initiatives took shape, developing projects based on the model. Six of these projects progressed toward implementation the following year. A system of additional consultations was introduced; a working group developed a platform certificate, and several organisations submitted project certificates with funding applications to the Ministry of Culture and local authorities in September 2023. Based on a collectively formulated concept, another working group organised an international symposium at which platform members drafted guidelines for implementing the model in Croatia.[7]

The second year of the platform's operation, 2024, was marked by a transition from an educational phase and drafting of guidelines to a phase of methodological consolidation. The loss of funding decreased the number of active participants to half, which slowed the platform's momentum.[8] However, it also had a positive effect on the quality of professional exchange among members. The monthly online meetings became more firmly rooted in the idea of collectively sharing participants' situated knowledge. Through collective analysis of ideas and activities and mutual feedback, members refined project initiatives.

The core expert team provided methodological guidance and developed a set of tools for mediators, including recommendations for project

7 The symposium was organised by Ana Busija, Sonja Leboš, Kristina Leko, Željka Miklošević and Maša Štrbac.

8 During its first year of operation, the platform received support from the Kultura nova Foundation, while the OLP artistic organisation was responsible for its administration and coordination. Each member organisation received a symbolic monthly stipend for participation. In the second year this funding ceased, and the number of member organisations decreased to approximately half.



Lubenica [Watermelon] mural in Sisak. Photo: Omar Peco



development and a set of questions designed to ensure methodological consistency and constructive project development in all phases, from initial contact with potential commissioners to final project realisation. These tools also help secure broader community support for projects. An archive of detailed meeting minutes accumulated our knowledge, while summaries of the minutes were regularly published on the platform's website to make our work accessible and transparent.[9]

During the first two years of regular monthly meetings, the platform functioned primarily as a laboratory for collective learning and research. It was a space for the theoretical and practical collective reflection on the application of the New Patrons model within concrete local communities. In this way, we began to develop a complex model of cultural production incorporating elements of professional networking, advocacy, exchange, education, and, in some cases, more traditional project partnerships. The first symposium occupies a particularly significant place within this process of collective work.

The First Symposium: Socialist Heritage and the Drafting of Guidelines

In October 2023, our first symposium was held at the KNAP Cultural Centre in Zagreb, founded in 1955 as the first House of Culture [*Dom kulture*] in the city and part of the socialist-era network of neighbourhood cultural centres. Located in a former working-class neighbourhood adjacent to an industrial zone, the KNAP has a rich history of participatory cultural formats dating back to the 1970s and 1980s. The symposium was designed to facilitate critical discussion and help us develop guidelines for adapting the New Patrons model to our context. The programme included lectures, workshops, and structured, participatory discussion formats that addressed theoretical and historical perspectives while reflecting on methodological questions. It attracted considerable media attention, partly due to the recent increased interest and *rediscovery* of socialist heritage in Croatia.[10]

Through a series of lectures delivered by members of our platform and invited experts, we sought to situate the New Patrons model within a broader historical continuum in relation to socialist traditions. Discussions addressed top-down models of commissioning art in public space after 1945, as well as

9 See more at: https://novi-narucitelji.hr/arhiva/.

10 Otvoreni likovni pogon, "Prvi simpozij nacionalne platforme Novi naručitelji HR".

participatory practices from the 1960s and 1970s, including artists' colonies, gallery and neighbourhood programs, and cultural centres. Much of the discussion focused on the extent to which contemporary applications of the model could build on local historical experiences. International speakers offered somewhat different perspectives on the model, including reflections on the East German context and methodological considerations.[11]

A series of six workshops addressed the key operational aspects of the model. Discussions focused on ways of initiating commissioning groups, the role and competencies of mediators, and possible funding models. Platform members participated in the workshops together with the audience, which consisted partly of professionals but also included several interested citizens. The discussions, therefore, touched upon the relationship between professional and civic actors, the civic-emancipatory potential of the model, and — in one session — the idea that citizens themselves might act as mediators.

Two workshops explored the potential of the New Patrons model in memory culture and in deindustrialised contexts, respectively. These sessions featured intense debates, especially concerning work in vulnerable or conflict-ridden environments. The discussions centred on how to respond to growing political extremism. This issue also strongly influenced the concluding discussions and overshadowed other themes. Cultural workers present at the symposium — many of them potential mediators — expressed concern about the possibility that a right-wing group might approach them with a request to commission a politically polarizing artwork in public space. While some participants expressed confidence in the New Patrons method and the power of democratic dialogue, arguing that the model provides mediators with sufficient safeguards through the selection of artists, a code of conduct, and dialogue to ensure an outcome that is acceptable to the broader community and situated within the spectrum of what Hers calls the "art of democracy", others argued that mediators should have the right to refuse collaboration and that the New Patrons model inevitably carries risks.[12] They also argued that guidelines should be developed for such situations.

Traces of these and other debates can be found in the guidelines for the further development of the platform and the model, a document that we collectively drafted on the final day of the symposium (provided here as the Appendix B). These guidelines constitute a local elaboration and contextual

11 Novi naručitelji HR, *Lecture by Judith Laister*; Novi naručitelji HR, *Lecture by Gerrit Gohlke*.
12 Hers, "New Patrons / A History", 19.

supplement to the original *New Patrons Protocol*. By taking the liberty of recontextualising Hers's manifesto, we symbolically entered a phase of normative and operational articulation of our own specific working model.[13] In this sense, the symposium can be understood as a performative moment in the formation of the Croatian platform.

Institutional Positioning (2024–2026)

Due to financial constraints, the platform intensified its efforts toward institutional positioning and networking in 2024. At the annual meeting of the international New Patrons network, we presented our work, hoping to join the network the following year and open possibilities for international projects and further collaboration.

Simultaneously, we decided to focus our activities on the Zagreb area because the City of Zagreb's cultural policy has actively promoted the revitalisation of cultural life in urban neighbourhoods and introduced funding for community-based art and culture since 2022. We established contacts with the city administration to explore how our productions could align with municipal governance procedures, especially regarding interventions in public space. Through this process, we identified potential sources of funding at the lowest level of municipal governance, including participatory budgeting mechanisms through which citizens directly decide on the allocation of public funds. We subsequently organised several public talks and presentations on the New Patrons model within local neighbourhood councils. Three new commissions emerged quite spontaneously from these encounters, which indicates, in my view, both a strong interest among citizens in the model and the potential of highly localised work within city neighbourhoods and local councils. These commissions included participatory choreography in a public space, a series of murals, and a participatory theatre production with a vulnerable group. Two of these projects were realised over the following two years.

To continue our efforts to implement the model in Zagreb, we formed a partnership with the newly established municipal institution, *Novi prostori kulture* [NPK, New Spaces of Culture], in 2025. As part of their programme of cultural events organised across city neighbourhoods, we held a series of public conversations with residents. Since NPK distributes programme invitations to every mailbox in the neighbourhood, the discussions were

13 Novi naručitelji HR, *Smjernice za razvoj Novih naručitelja u Hrvatskoj; Nastup zbora Ružmarinke*.

attended by motivated and interested citizens. Our expanded, younger team introduced the model and mapped existing civic initiatives and locally relevant topics. This collaboration resulted in the formation of a commissioning group of former *Sljeme* factory workers in the suburban district of Sesvete and a partnership with the local heritage museum, *Muzej Prigorje*. Two additional neighbourhood interventions in collaboration with NPK are planned for 2027.

Although the NPK partnership does not provide substantial funding, we consider this collaboration meaningful and valuable in the long term. Through this partnership, we are effectively integrating the New Patrons model into widely attended cultural events in city neighbourhoods lacking cultural infrastructure and regular programming — the very areas in which NPK organises its activities and which we likewise consider important sites of engagement.

Project Range and Typology — From Blind Commissioners to a Project with War Veterans that Would Never Start

The first commission in Croatia to follow the New Patrons model was established at the end of 2023 for the *Uredimo zdenac* project [Let's Restore the Well]. Mediator Maša Štrbac (OLP) joined a local citizens' initiative in her neighbourhood that advocated for the restoration of several neglected historic wells. A group of young architects developed several design proposals, and residents selected one for implementation. However, the project did not receive enough votes in the 2024 round of local participatory budgeting, as residents ultimately prioritised other initiatives. This case taught us that local actors may feel intimidated by the *Novi naručitelji* platform and that additional strategies must be developed for such situations — strategies that explicitly acknowledge and ensure visibility for both the pre-existing civic initiative and the commissioning group.[14]

In mid-2024, the *Lubenica* [Watermelon] mural was completed in Sisak, commissioned by a local football club — this marked the first completed project in the country following the model. Mediator Filip Pjerobon successfully resolved a conflict between artist Ena Jurov, who used the watermelon motif to draw public attention to the Palestinian issue, and members of the club's management.[15] The Sisak case also represents a positive example of a public institution — the municipal Striegl Gallery —

14 Štrbac, "Uredimo zdenac".
15 Pjerobon, "Izrada murala u Sisku".

integrating the New Patrons model into its programme by officially employing a curator to participate in the platform and develop projects following the model.

The Association of Blind Persons of the City of Požega is the commissioner of the *Požega for the Blind* project. This commission aims to make the city's cultural heritage accessible to blind individuals and also to attract them as tourists; it also seeks to contribute to inclusive tourism. The project is methodologically challenging, participatory, and inclusive. In certain respects, it departs from the classical structure of the New Patrons model. In this case, mediator Vera Ćuže-Abramović, an artist and art educator who has carried out cultural and artistic projects in this small town with a group of high school students for many years, has assigned the role of artist-designers to a group of students and local designers. They are commissioned to develop a series of interventions in the city's public spaces. However, collaborating with blind participants requires additional steps; the artist-designers must first become familiar with the lived experience of blindness. Consequently, the development of the project — more precisely, the mediation process between the artist-designers and the blind commissioners — becomes a research project in its own right: a series of workshops and an exhibition developed through collaboration between a group of artists and a group of blind participants.[16] By sharing their experiences, the latter introduce the artist-designers to alternative ways of perceiving space and heritage, allowing the artists to develop new approaches. Therefore, the project is developing slowly over the long term.

The platform also developed several additional projects, including a grassroots urbanism initiative by the organisation Culture Hub Croatia in Split. This initiative continues work begun in 2021 on the development of a shared green space and is now being developed following the New Patrons model (*Livada* project, mediator Jasmina Šarić). KA-MATRIX, an association based in Karlovac, and mediator Denis Mikšić, who has extensive experience with the placemaking methodology, have begun developing contacts with a group of war veterans planning to erect a memorial dedicated to the Croatian War of Independence. The challenges encountered at each step of the communication process highlighted the extent to which certain social spaces remain divided, as well as the reservations and prejudices that persist. This demonstrates that applying the New Patrons model within the field of memory culture will by no means be straightforward. Štoos Teatar,

16 Ćuže-Abramović, "Izložba Požega s druge strane pogleda"; Galić, "Požega s druge strane pogleda".

an independent theatre in Velika Gorica, together with mediator Ana Katunić, has proposed a commission for a public sculpture depicting the critically endangered Turopolje cattle — an indigenous breed — to be installed in the town's central square, another project that will likely take many years to be realised.

During 2025 and 2026, the organisation OLP is implementing two projects following the New Patrons model within the City of Zagreb's municipal programme *Art in the Community*. One of these projects, although culturally and politically interesting in that it addresses youth subculture in late socialism, is artistically relatively conventional as it aligns with the city-wide trend of mural production. The other project — commissioned by the staff of the Rehabilitation Centre Zagreb in the Stenjevec neighbourhood — is methodologically particularly intriguing: it offers insight into applying the New Patrons model in contexts involving vulnerable groups.

The Centre's staff commissioned a participatory theatre performance for the Centre's residents and subsequently delegated the implementation of the commission to one of the residents, who thus assumed the role of an additional commissioner. Taking on this role very actively, he became both the scriptwriter and the main performer in the play, providing decisive input to the artist responsible for shaping and directing the performance. From the perspective of the classical New Patrons model, this situation produces porous boundaries between the roles of commissioner, artist, and performer, resulting in a hybrid configuration of authorship. At the same time, as the mediator has argued, the model must remain open to such environments, in which precisely this kind of flexible distribution of roles and expanded participatory framework proves meaningful.[17]

If we attempt a typology of the projects developed within the *Novi naručitelji HR* platform, several patterns begin to emerge. A research-oriented approach is particularly prominent in three of the nine ongoing projects (*Tvornica Sljeme*, *Požega for the Blind*, and *Crnica*). Furthermore, community-based political activism and the shaping of commons are present in six out of the nine projects (*Uredimo zdenac*, *Požega for the Blind*, *Lubenica*, *Tvornica Sljeme*, *Livada*, and *Crnica*). Among these, three projects build upon already existing civic initiatives (*Uredimo zdenac*, *Tvornica Sljeme*, *Crnica*), to which the New Patrons model was introduced as a kind of extension — an artistic layer added to activities that were already underway.

17 Štrbac, "Kazalište snova – scena za sve".

Of the nine initiated projects, four can be described as participatory in the sense that not only does the commissioning process involve citizens, but also other members of the community – and in some cases even some of the commissioners themselves – participate creatively in the realisation of the artwork. In two of the nine projects, the commissioners belong to vulnerable groups, which highlights inclusivity as another key emphasis of the Croatian platform. Finally, the invited artists are generally not internationally established figures (with one exception), but rather locally based practitioners. In this way, the projects contribute to strengthening local cultural capacities, directing the New Patrons' interventions towards the cultural cohesion of the communities in which they take place.

Case Study Crnica – Healing Contaminated Soil

The *Crnica* project, commissioned by citizens of Šibenik and developed by mediator Sonja Leboš (AIIR) and artist Lana Stojićević, will allow me to further explore the particularities of adapting the New Patrons model to the Croatian context, here within the project *Art Living Lab to Repair the Land* (ALILAND). This is the sole project on our platform with significant funding.

Earlier, I mentioned a particular characteristic of the postsocialist space in relation to deindustrialisation. Among those of us living in postsocialist societies, there is a tacit understanding that the experience of deindustrialisation in this region (both postsocialist and post-Yugoslav) has been particularly traumatic. Unlike in many Western countries, deindustrialisation here coincided with the devastation during the Croatian War of Independence in the 1990s, and with an ideological rupture that delegitimised previously existing forms of life, knowledge, and social identities.

Former factory workers in the United Kingdom – as critical heritage studies remind us – have been traumatised by the depoliticisation of industrial heritage and the transformation of their communities into sites of cultural and tourist industries from which they have been largely excluded. Similarly, in Croatia, postsocialist redundant workers were stripped not only of their employment but also of their worldview and the freedom of thought, which were now dismissed as an "ideological burden".[18]

18 Vuković, "Industrijska baština ili industrija baštine?"; Strangleman, "'Smokestack Nostalgia,' 'Ruin Porn' or Working-Class Obituary".

However, numerous voices, both among affected communities and within mainstream theory, today attest that the era of objectifying perspectives and authoritative heritage practices has passed. The idea that heritage is fundamentally intangible – that is, a social process – and that communities should therefore act as subjects who determine and manage its material manifestations has gained such broad support that it has become almost self-evident. As such, it is reflected in the current definition of museums adopted by ICOM, which emphasises participation of communities, i.e. dialogue as key mode of preserving and interpreting heritage and of producing knowledge.[19]

Historically speaking, the New Patrons model can be seen as part of the broader efforts that have contributed to this understanding of heritage. Significantly, the model has promoted not only the idea that communities are subjects, but also the idea that art situated within communities can empower people and thereby encourage them to collectively address shared problems. Within this context, it becomes almost self-evident why someone might initiate a project that seeks to repair territories damaged by economic exploitation through participatory artistic practices – such as the ALILAND project.[20]

The broader region in which the Croatian ALILAND project takes place is the Šibenik–Knin County, mentioned earlier as a site of intense mnemonic and ideological struggles. Conflicts over memory here do not stop at the Second World War or the Croatian War of Independence; they extend as well to the terrain of workers' pasts and industrial heritage.

The project *Crnica* focuses on the Šibenik neighbourhood of the same name and on the industrial site where the *Tvornica elektroda i ferolegura* [TEF, Electrodes and Ferroalloys Factory] operated until 1994. The site was partially remediated in 2011, when 140,000 tons of toxic slag were relocated to a war-depopulated village in the hinterland. The disappearance of the factory left behind, in the post-war period, a wound of economic transition and unemployment in the social fabric. It also left behind contaminated soil, an urban void, and a fragmented and conflicted memory of the socialist self-managed labour.[21] With the conviction and hope that participatory processes

19 International Council of Museums, "Museum Definition".

20 Art Living Lab, "What Do We Do?"

21 Self-management socialism was the Yugoslav political and economic system introduced with the Workers' Self-Management Act in 1950, under which workers participated in the management of enterprises and institutions through workers' councils. The system emerged in opposition to the centralized model of Soviet state socialism.

of artistic production can help heal this territory, mediator Sonja Leboš continued her research on the deindustrialisation of the Šibenik area, a topic she had already explored earlier in her work as a cultural anthropologist.

The New Patrons process for the *Crnica* project in Šibenik began with meetings of a small group of citizen experts, including a neighbourhood journalist with long-standing knowledge of the site, a landscape architect, an author of a book on the city's industrialisation, and several proactive residents. Together, they formed a working group that exchanged scholarly literature and information. They discussed ways to involve the broader community, to research the site's history in a participatory and public way, and to interpret and disseminate that history. The group also considered ways to connect neighbours, former factory workers, young people, and children. After several sessions, the working group commissioned an artistic project to stimulate public debate and collective reflection on the site's future. The commission seeks process-based, participatory, and educational artwork intended to initiate the imagining of possible futures. At the same time, the artwork should prove that civic participation can guide common goods toward a more just and sustainable future.[22]

The invited artist, Lana Stojićević, grew up on the street leading to the factory and had previously explored the subjects in a series of works. Photographs from 2015 document a performance in which the artist, dressed in a folkloric-futuristic costume, moves through a landscape of black, toxic slag hills.[23] Three years later, she organised a performative walk with former factory workers at the site, the audio recording of which was published on the sound-mapping platform Aporee.[24] In 2019 she also produced an artist's publication — a new issue of the factory newspaper *TEF* — bringing together workers' memories, historical documents, and her own illustrations. The publication was distributed free of charge in cafés and cultural venues across the city, accompanied by an invitation to reflect critically on the condition of the former factory site and to engage in collective action concerning its future.[25]

From a typological perspective, this project points to a specific mode of working characteristic of the mediator-researcher (as opposed, for instance, to the mediator-curator), in which the commissioning group gradually takes

22 Art Living Lab, "Electricity Aftermath".
23 Stojićević, *Crno brdo = Black Hill*.
24 The audio work can be accessed by typing the address "Prilaz tvornici 39, 22000 Šibenik" in the search machine of the aporee platform: https://aporee.org/maps/.
25 Stojićević, *Kad ne dime tvornički dimnjaci*; Stojićević, *Kad ne dime tvornički dimnjaci – TEF – tvorničke novine*.

shape through a research-based and activist process. Rather than being constituted at the outset, the commissioning group develops out of a working group — termed as such by the mediator herself — composed of local experts and community activists.[26] The invited artist, through her previous work, also operates as a researcher and activist, so that the project can be understood as building upon existing civic initiatives. This example illustrates the shift that occurs within the structure of the New Patrons model — and in the division of roles between commissioner, mediator, and artist — in projects that possess a pronounced research-based and activist dimension.

Furthermore, within the constellation of research-based and activist artistic interventions as we see here, commissioners emerge through processes of shared inquiry and collective action, through the articulation of problems and the gradual assumption of responsibility for the commissioning of an artwork. In such constellations, the relationship between the mediator-researcher, the local protagonists, and the artistic producers approaches the paradigm of *participatory action research*, in which research, collective learning, and practical intervention develop in parallel and mutually inform one another, as we also saw in the case of *Požega for the Blind*.[27]

In this sense, the New Patrons model, when applied within research-driven and socially engaged artistic practices, can operate as a hybrid framework that combines artistic mediation with participatory research. Such an approach may depart from a classical interpretation of Hers's *Protocol*; however, within the context of contemporary interdisciplinary practices, it appears as a necessary update that does not compromise the core principles of Hers's manifesto.

Conclusion

This text set out to examine whether the adaptation of the New Patrons model to the Croatian context displays any specific characteristics. Based on the preceding discussion, I will briefly outline several of these particularities.

26 UIII, "ALILAND Radna grupa Crnica – 1. sastanak"; UIII, "ALILAND Radna grupa Crnica – 2. sastanak"; UIII, "ALILAND Radna grupa Crnica – 3. sastanak"; UIII, "ALILAND Radna grupa Crnica – 4. sastanak."

27 Participatory action research (PAR) is a social science movement founded by Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals-Borda (1925–2008). Its First World Symposium was held in Cartagena in 1977 and was related to the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1921–1997) and his pedagogy of the oppressed. Rappaport, *Cowards Don't Make History*; Fals-Borda, Rahman, *Action and Knowledge*.

The main specificity of the Croatian organisation of the New Patrons lies in the form of self-organisation through a collaborative platform, which, over a two-year period, functioned as a laboratory of collective learning and research aimed at adapting the model to the local context. Within this framework, participating organisations jointly explored the potentials of local communities, mapping civic initiatives as well as pressing issues and themes, while simultaneously developing their individual projects through a collective process. In this sense, the collaborative platform *Novi naručitelji HR* gradually became a laboratory for collective learning and project incubation through which the New Patrons model was reflected upon and adapted to the local context.

Furthermore, the implementation of the model in Croatia is located almost exclusively within the independent cultural scene and in municipal community-art programmes connected to it. The projects operate with very modest funding (in contrast, for example, to the French and German models, which maintain strong connections with major foundations), and they often build upon already existing civic initiatives.

Based on an analysis of the projects and their typology, we can observe that the implementation of the New Patrons model in Croatia places particular emphasis on interdisciplinary, research-based, activist, participatory, and inclusive projects involving vulnerable groups. In such projects, shifts occur in the roles of commissioners, mediators, and artists as defined in the *Protocol*. Furthermore, work with already existing civic activist initiatives reveals the need for citizen-mediators, which also represents a departure from the classically defined roles. However, this need belongs to the broader practices of community-rooted cultural mediation, while similar examples of expanding the mediation team through local coordinators is to be found in the new Patrons projects in other countries as well.

The Croatian implementation of the New Patrons model has developed as a platform-based, research-participatory form of cultural production in which projects emerge from existing social processes, while the roles of commissioners, mediators, and artists become flexible and situationally defined. An open question remains whether such a transformation primarily stems from the specificities of the postsocialist context — in which contemporary cultural production continues certain local traditions of participatory culture from the socialist period — or from the broader development of socially engaged artistic practices over recent decades, which have introduced participatory models into the central discursive

spaces of contemporary art, including *Documenta* and other major international exhibitions.

In conclusion, the development of the Croatian platform can be read simultaneously as part of the global rise of community-based artistic practices and as a reflection of local postsocialist traditions of participatory culture. It seems that the strong emphasis on interdisciplinary, research-based social art practices and civic activism in our projects results in a reinterpretation of the *Protocol* that takes into account its situatedness within a particular artistic-production paradigm of clearly defined class roles — roles that François Hers sought to critique and overturn with his *Protocol* in 1990.

Our implementation, which unfolds within the landscape of civil society organisations, applies the model with an awareness of ideals and ideas connected to local participatory and inclusive traditions from the socialist period. In this sense, the Croatian adaptation of the New Patrons model may also be understood as a form of resistance to so-called Western cultural dominance, as an attempt of establishing a more equal exchange while repositioning the postsocialist experience within the field of contemporary art — not merely as a site of reception of Western methodologies, but as a context capable of producing its own situated knowledge and methodological contributions.

In this sense, I would recall once more the programme of the first *Novi naručitelji HR* symposium, which brought the socialist legacy into the field of reflection and concluded with a collective process of drafting guidelines for adopting the model in Croatia. Although the guidelines do not appear to introduce revolutionary changes to the *Protocol*, but rather situate it within a new context, their performative and symbolic role is significant. They represent a voice emerging from a postsocialist space that resists the mere importation of methodologies.

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APPENDIX A – CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW (2019–2026)

2019 – The Zagreb-based art organisation *Otvoreni likovni pogon* [OLP, Open Art Drive] establishes contact with the German organisation *Neue Auftraggeber* to initiate a professional exchange on the New Patrons model; research begins into the possibilities of implementing the model in the Croatian context.

2020–2021 – With programmatic support from the *Kultura nova Foundation*, OLP conducts an exchange with the Berlin office of the New Patrons network; the methodological and organisational aspects of the model are analysed; OLP prepares a professional study outlining the model and its potential applications in Croatia.

2022 – OLP publishes the study presenting the New Patrons model to the Croatian professional public; the Association for Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Research (AIIR), in collaboration with the *Sikirica Gallery* in Sinj, develops the programme *Les Nouveaux Commanditaires and New Readings of Artistic and Spatial Practices of Yugoslav Socialism*; in August, at the initiative of OLP, the collaborative platform *Novi naručitelji HR* [New Patrons Croatia] is founded with 24 participating organisations and institutions, and an application is submitted to the *Kultura nova* Foundation for funding its activities; in September, in partnership with OLP and the Croatian Architects' Association, and with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia, a two-day professional programme is organised with French pioneer mediators Amanda Crabtree and Valérie Cudel, bringing together several figures who would later become key actors within the platform.

2023 – At the beginning of the year, a presentation of the model was held at the Directorate for the Development of Culture and the Arts within the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia, without further outcomes. The platform begins holding regular monthly meetings involving 25 organisations and institutions from 16 different localities. Several initiatives for projects following the New Patrons model are conceptualised; the platform's core expert team begins developing digital tools to support the development and implementation of projects. In the Zagreb neighbourhood of Stenjevec, the first commissioners' group is formed, the first commission is written, and a proposal for a public-space intervention is selected (*Let's Restore the Well* project, mediator Maša Štrbac, OLP). In October, the first *Novi naručitelji* HR Symposium is held, where guidelines for the platform's further development are formulated collectively. Over the course of the year, the number of member organisations increases.

2024 – Due to the loss of funding, the number of active members of the collaborative platform has decreased, yet the platform continues its activities through

regular monthly meetings and ongoing project development. The first project following the New Patrons model in Croatia is realised (*Watermelon*, by artist Ena Jurov, commissioned by the *Zeleni brijeg* Football Club in Sisak; mediator Filip Pjerobon, Striegl City Gallery, Sisak). The project *Požega for the Blind* was initiated (commissioned by the local association of blind persons; mediator Vera Ćuže-Abramović). OLP began presenting the model to local neighbourhood councils in the City of Zagreb and at public events, resulting in two new commissions (in the neighbourhoods of Španska and Brezovica). The platform's annual gathering takes place in Sinj and Split. *Novi naručitelji HR* presents its work at a meeting of the international New Patrons network. AIIR joins the project *ALILAND – Art Living Lab to Repair the Land* (2025–2026) as the representative of the Croatian platform, in partnership with Spanish and German organisations.

2025 – Coordination of the platform is taken over by the association Culture Hub Croatia (CHC) from Split; the number of active participants decreases. AIIR began implementing the ALILAND project in Šibenik at the site of the former TEF factory. OLP partners with Zagreb's municipal institution *Novi prostori kulture* [New Spaces of Culture] to introduce the New Patrons model at neighbourhood cultural events through public discussions with residents. As part of a residency programme, Italian artist Chiara Gambirasio develops a commission by a group of citizens in Split (*Livada* project; mediator Jasmina Šarić, CHC). A project commissioned by residents of the Zagreb Rehabilitation Center is realised (*Theatre of Dreams*; artist Kruna Tarle, mediator Maša Štrbac, OLP). The platform's annual gathering takes place at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb within the international conference *Participation in Art/Museums*, which includes a section dedicated to the New Patrons model.

2026 – Coordination of the platform is taken over by AIIR. AIIR produces an artistic intervention in Šibenik (*Crnica* project; artist Lana Stojićević; commissioners: a group of residents; mediator Sonja Leboš). OLP implements a series of murals in the Zagreb neighbourhood of Španska with support from the City of Zagreb's *Art in the Community* programme (*Our Neighbourhood, Our Childhood*; commissioned by a group of residents; artist Nikolina Manojlović Vračar; mediator Maša Štrbac). OLP continues its partnership with the municipal institution *Novi prostori kulture* and starts collaboration with the Prigorje Museum in Sesvete on a commission related to the site of the former Sljeme factory, initiated by former factory workers. In partnership with the *Pučko otvoreno učilište Zagreb*, a public adult education and cultural centre, and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb, the first educational programme for mediators working within the New Patrons model is being organised, open to applications from the general public.

APPENDIX B – Preliminary Guidelines Novi naručitelji HR [New Patrons Croatia]

(Zagreb, 14 October 2023)

Preamble: The platform's goal is to establish a set of ethical and aesthetic values. The platform aims to create a network of experts who will collaborate in order to democratise and culturally develop the community.

Guideline 1: The Platform Novi naručitelji HR is a group of professional mediators. Its task is to establish criteria for selecting commissions.

Guideline 2: The role of the mediators is to build a relationship of trust with a particular community and advocate for their needs. The role of the mediators is to connect the local community with funding sources and with the artist, while respecting the local context. The role of the mediators is to channel the needs of the community through artistic works.

Guideline 3: Every citizen or group of citizens has the right to approach the platform with their ideas.

Guideline 4: The platform's visibility in society should be ensured. The platform communicates its identity to the public.

Guideline 5: From the conception of the commission to its realisation, all participants (mediators, commissioners, artists, donors, partners) should consider the public interest of the community for which the artistic work is being commissioned.

Guideline 6: The mediator should act as a moderator and an organiser behind the scenes.

Guideline 7: The mediator comes into contact with the commission in two ways: by initiating contact with the community or by receiving contact from the community.

Guideline 8: The mediator takes into account the differences within the commissioning group as well as within the community, in terms of class, level of education, symbolic capital, and advocates for social equality and equality concerning nationality, skin colour, sexual orientation, gender, and religion.

Guideline 9: The mediator is obliged to ensure equal participation conditions for different individuals within the commissioning group. When working with minority identity groups, it should include a representative from the group within the mediation team.

Guideline 10: One of the platform's activities is to educate about spatial culture within the platform and to educate potential users through publishing, lectures, etc.

Guideline 11: The mediator's task is to listen to the needs of the community without imposing projects or ideas that serve the mediator themselves, and to educate the community on the design of public space and the importance of active participation.

Guideline 12: The importance of responsibility and the rights of all stakeholders in the New Patrons process: commissioners, mediators, and artists share the responsibility.

Guideline 13: The platform, as a network, functions as a point of contact and a catalogue of potential mediators and resources for groups from local communities who wish to become a commissioning group but do not know whom to approach or how.

Guideline 14: The platform's task is to engage partners who ensure the visibility of the platform's activities.

Guideline 15: The commissioning and realisation process should be transparent and publicly accessible.

Guideline 16: The platform issues a certificate and sets the criteria for its issue, as well as determining the stage at which it is issued.

Guideline 17: When working with commissioners and communicating the project to the public, the mediator pays attention to naming and describing the community for whom the commissioners are working, whilst striving to be as precise as possible.

Guideline 18: Protecting the platform's name and creating a legal framework is the platform's responsibility.

Guideline 19: The platform encourages and motivates citizens to address issues of public interest while adapting to the local context.

Guideline 20: Through Novi naručitelji HR projects, vulnerable groups of citizens should become visible to the broader community. The platform should pay special attention to this.

Guideline 21: The members of the platform mutually agree to organise coordination according to democratic principles.

Guideline 22: The platform is responsible for ensuring that everyone involved in the realisation of Novi naručitelji HR projects is adequately and fairly compensated, which may include members of the commissioning group, unless they explicitly waive the fee.

Guideline 23: The mediator is responsible for ensuring that the work is registered as public or community property and that it is clear who is responsible for its maintenance.

Guideline 24: The stakeholders involved in implementing Novi naručitelji HR projects can include a wide variety of public, municipal, and private companies, other economic entities, civil society, cultural institutions, local initiatives and informal citizen groups, local committees, cities, municipalities, states, Local Action Groups (LAGs), tourist boards, educational institutions (kindergartens, primary, secondary and high schools, higher education institutions and universities), and the media.

Guideline 25: The task of platform members is to support one another and share their experiences of working on projects through jointly organised exchanges.

Guideline 26: The platform guarantees that Novi naručitelji HR projects are of public interest, in public spaces, and in public ownership, and they cannot be privately owned.

Guideline 27: The platform's task is to offer mediators a variety of artists so that they can more easily select suitable artists. The mediator invites the artist based on their professional assessment of the commissioners' needs and is responsible for successful communication between the artist and the commissioners.

Guideline 28: The platform should engage in various associations (e.g., the Croatian Chamber of Commerce, the Association of Cities, universities, etc.) to increase its visibility and facilitate funding.

Guideline 29: The platform's work is public, as is the work process within each individual Novi naručitelji HR project. The mediator is obliged to ensure communication and information-sharing with the community.

Guideline 30: The task of platform members is to present and educate their communities about the platform and its model.

Guideline 31: Novi naručitelji HR projects include and support, among other things, intermediality.

Guideline 32: Once the project is completed, it should be publicly presented and made accessible to as many people as possible, promoting the New Patrons model.

Guideline 33: The platform provides education and professional assistance to anyone who wants to become a mediator.

Guideline 34: The Novi naručitelji HR platform operates on democratic principles, where each member has a vote, and roles are rotational. The platform commits to regularly conducting self-criticism and evaluation, leaving space open for redefining elements of the protocol, for example, the autonomy of mediators.

Guideline 35: The platform certifies projects and mediators and develops a mediator code. Mediators have the freedom to withdraw from a project if they deem it necessary.

Guideline 36: Each member is obliged to document the project's progress.

A Parliament for Repair

Fran Quiroga

Everything around us was connected to slate; my father's work, which covered the houses; the patron saint's feast day, which featured a "best slate cutter" contest; even the stones we used to mark our imaginary goalposts were slate. Everything was connected to that metamorphic rock.

Some 60 years ago, humans started working to extract the slate created by nature more than 550 million years ago, to help shelter us, in the best-case scenario, or to play its role in housing speculation, in the worst. When we were children, my mother would take my two siblings and me to play in the snow on the highest peak in our local area and in the whole of Galicia. On the way there, we followed roads that were unusually wide, designed to allow bulldozers and Land Rovers filled with mine workers to move up and down the mountainside. Flanking those roads were great split crags from which a procession of massive machines incessantly extracted our own particular local gold. As we ascended the slopes, the landscape became that of a large open-cast mine. To one side there were mountains of rubble that, fortunately, nature was rewilding. Meanwhile, the big companies insisted on adding to the expanding piles with more slate debris, all the same.

Although we were small — I lived there until I was just ten years old — we already sensed that this place was more artifice than nature, and that this destroyed landscape was also degrading the fragile social relationships on which our society was built. Years later, we learned that this territory was what we now call a *sacrifice zone*. We were also able to certify that this broken space had not, in fact, provided a solution to anything that we had been told it would fix. Many people emigrated from the local area, as did vast numbers of Galicians in general during the twentieth century. Once an emigrant had left, they could never return to the same land that haunted their dreams. It would never be the same again. Eventually, the mine devoured everything.

More years went by, and we also discovered that guerrillas had hidden out in the yew forest above the mines during the Spanish Civil War and for quite a few years after it ended. They represented the last resistance to the dictatorship that devastated Spanish society for almost 40 years. Near this incredible landscape, which has somehow survived the threat of the slate

quarries, is another site in ruins. It is where tungsten was extracted during the Civil War and World War II to provide the armour for tanks in Nazi Germany.

My grandfather worked in those mines. In this sense, we embodied the words of Bruno Latour when he suggested that we had never been modern. The separation between nature and culture as the crux of modernity was never more entrenched than it was in this modernity, which insisted on separating science from politics, beliefs from reason. Yet surely very few periods of history can boast a greater interaction between culture and nature. My grandfather mined tungsten; others used it in war. Eighty years later, I studied politics thanks to an income generated from the installation of slate roofs. Meanwhile, that territory, where I no longer live, continued to be one of the jewels in the crown of the Spanish mining industry.

Here, the fractured nature of this tale of progress is not a metaphor but a visible landscape. In this territory, the history of accumulated layers of mining and scarring is brutally laid bare. Many justify this place as the necessary flipside of prosperity, a flipside that just a few had to endure.

Sometimes, when I go back to that area — something I do less and less frequently — I wonder how we could contribute with art to addressing that whole assemblage of wounds, suppurating on the land and in society. As I walk down the streets there, I wonder whether it is still possible to heal the wounds inflicted on that sacrifice zone, with its fragmented ecosystem and torn social fabric. Or, on the contrary, should the role of art be limited to entertainment alone? It is not totally clear to me, but I think this place has paid the price of a certain model of development with its own ecological, social and symbolic integrity. Now it is time to question — and acknowledge — all that has been taken from it. Perhaps knowing oneself as debris from a conscious and empowering standpoint (albeit with an inevitable initial discomfort), allows one to experiment and move towards other ways of building futures.

What Do You Do with a Scar Like That?

Understandably, the first response, the most common and human response, is usually nostalgia: the desire to recover what was, to restore a lost image of the land and the community. There is something deeply legitimate in that instinct: to name what has been lost is already an act of resistance against those who would prefer the damage to go unnoticed. Recognising that there was a ‘before’ is also a way of calling for accountability.



Legacy Care project, one of the working sessions with the neighbors, September 2020.
Photo: Oscar Górriz



That notwithstanding, where nostalgia becomes the only frame of reference, we end up trapped. No matter how much we want it to, the past is not coming back. Those people have gone, and the image of that territory has changed. Indeed, part of the terrain no longer exists. Idealising a past subject through its own contradictions, through its internal violence and exclusions, can become an obstacle to imagining other, desirable futures. This does not mean we should cancel out the ancestry that precedes us. Far from it: processes that might heal many of the wounds caused by modernity can only be set in motion if we use that legacy as a starting point. Nostalgia is somewhat immobile, given that from a nostalgic perspective, we are exclusively perceived as victims of history and not subjects with the capacity to construct the present. Apart from contemplating helplessly how something can irremediably slip away like that, we have to find another way to relate to the rupture, one that recognises the pain or the loss without falling into a trap.

Anthropologist Anna Tsing offers an important clue when she states that we must start by understanding uncertainty as a natural state of affairs.[1] Rather than constituting an exceptional situation to be remedied as soon as possible with a view to returning to normality, uncertainty should be considered an ordinary condition of existence. We should accept that certainties were nothing more than the great mirage of progress. Things break, systems fail, fabrics disintegrate. It is not a mistake or an anomaly but the way things genuinely are.

Fragility, then, is not a defeat but a space of possibility. That doesn't mean celebrating it or pretending it doesn't hurt. It means not rejecting or hiding it, not rushing to cover it up, and not applying solutions that restore the appearance of normality while failing to address root causes. To paraphrase the formula made famous by Donna Haraway,[2] we should inhabit the problem, staying with it long enough to allow something new to emerge from within.

What Do We Mean When We Talk About Repair?

If nostalgia proposes that we restore what is lost, and that restoration turns out to be impossible or insufficient, then we need to rethink what it means to repair something. In the sense we are interested in here, repair is not synonymous with restoration. It is not going back to the source,

1 Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*.
2 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.

reconstructing a lost image or erasing the traces of what happened there. Repair works with the scar rather than against it.

In his seminal article *Rethinking Repair*, researcher Steven Jackson says that "it asks what happens when we take erosion, breakdown, and decay, rather than novelty, growth, and progress, as our starting points in thinking through nature".[3] The author starts by examining the inherent fragility of the worlds we inhabit, both in their natural and social dimensions, recognising, like Anna Tsing, that many of the orders of Eurocentric modernity are "in (the) process of coming apart, perhaps to be replaced by new and better stories and orders, but perhaps not".[4] At the same time, Jackson underlines his deep admiration for those daily practices that maintain stability thanks to the constant and invisible repair of small things. Those who pick up rubbish, sew torn trousers or fix fallen walls, are the *maintainers* who somehow take care of and repair those breakages. These practices contain within them an interesting game of trying to restore the past, yet at the same time creating something new. A total reassembly.

From this perspective, repair is not a heroic moment of innovation or the origins of something radically new (which is what usually fascinates us); rather, it is more modest, more constant work. It is that space on the margins which many surely consider abject. This is the fracturing of what is clean, what is neat. It is the mine that destroyed the mountain, it is those abandoned buildings in the middle of a beach, or the denim jacket that our mother insisted on mending with elbow patches. Another solution would be to just throw away that broken object or do something about that mess.

That is why there is something political about the decision. Repair is not only the technical act of fixing what is broken, restoring what was damaged, but also an act of reparation, redistributing value and recognising those who have borne the costs of the breakage.

In the town I am from, despite significant emigration, small hopeful forces for transformation are emerging. Today, many associations of residents that have commoners' rights are asserting their ownership of the mountainsides, demanding compensation from the quarries for decades of use of that common land. A slow process beset by barriers is underway to achieve reparations for communities that have been dispossessed and defiled. It opens up the possibility of redistributing part of the profits from the mining

3 Jackson, "Rethinking Repair", p. 221.
4 *Ibid.*, p. 222.

industry, returning them to the community — especially in those cases where there are commoner rights that should never have been ignored.

But while it is necessary, material repair does not solve the problem. There are wounds that cannot be healed with financial compensation or the restitution of property rights. There is a symbolic, relational and memorial fabric that has also been damaged, and it has to be mended in a different way. Which memories deserve to be recovered? What is the legitimate narrative of what happened in a place? Who has the right to tell its story? We should ask ourselves how we can contribute to this new process, which anticipates a future that is as yet unrealised, but almost within sight.

Is an Art Intervention Appropriate There?

The usual response is to say that art helps to raise awareness. Art makes visible that which has remained hidden, seeking to move those who have become indifferent — and perhaps succeeding in doing so. This has some truth to it: art and culture have a unique ability to focus on things we would not otherwise have paid attention to.

Perhaps due to this interest in the sensitising function of art, the mural has become the form of artistic intervention *par excellence* in community contexts. It is visible and accessible. It also embellishes that cement wall, replacing its hard grey with an explosion of many colours. There's nothing wrong with murals. But when they become the default format for any participatory process, then something important has been lost. Even if they are a pleasing way of communicating content, the risk is that we reduce art to a mere adornment of the message.

Limiting art to awareness-raising turns it into an instrument at the service of other political, social or environmental purposes. Again, there is nothing wrong with using art for a greater cause — especially if that cause is political. That is where the aesthetic, ethical and political programme extolled by Jacques Rancière comes into its own in its finest form.[5] But reducing the scope of art to raising awareness alone also shrinks the specific yet immeasurable aspects of artistic practice itself.

Art can educate, but it also generates spaces for enunciation, something fully understood by researcher Belén Sola, filmmaker Chus Domínguez and a wide

5 Rancière, *El reparto de lo sensible*.



Legacy Care project, artwork by Carme Nogueira, May 2024. Photo: Oscar Górriz



Land Commons project, ritual party designed by Asunción Molinos Gordo in Couso's communal woodland, October 2024. Photo: Andy Iglesias

range of other allies who created projects such as *Damn Mine / Puta Mina*,[6] an audiovisual excavation of the Gordón mining basin in León that weaves together images and women's memories of their connection to the mining industry. We would be forgiven for thinking that this is just a new device to increase awareness of what happened there. But if we dig a little deeper into the process itself — and not just its results — we can see that *Puta Mina* was an exercise in collective production and management in which the local people not only get to tell their own story but also take on the role of co-creators in this polyphonic narrative.

The collective had already rehearsed this exercise in contemporary autoethnography in other processes, such as *Libertad* [Freedom],[7] a film based on 90-year-old Josefa Castro García's oral testimony, recorded in 2011, recounting a life marked by the Civil War and post-war repression. Based on her story, 17 high school students – around the same age as Josefa Castro during the Civil War — developed an idea for a film as they all undertook a shared process of discovering audiovisual language. This Laboratory of Experimental Audiovisual Anthropology [LAAV, *Laboratorio de Antropología Audiovisual Experimental*], develops participatory methods for collective creation with a focus on aesthetics. The resulting art must make space for the pain that arises from addressing collective wounds. That sensitivity, that so-called "distribution of the sensible" must be present in the final piece. Art's relevance lies in its offering a unique position from which to challenge hegemonic aesthetics. I hope this continues to be the case — even in the AI era. In this sense, perhaps it is best that our timing and rhythm are not those imposed on us by the frantic world we live in; rather, we should seek to build a space or a gesture that can play a small part in countering the economy of attention.

In a world of sensory hyperstimulation, the ability to focus on something for as long as it takes to truly understand it, has become a scarce commodity. In addition, participatory artistic processes — those that unfold over months or years, that involve regular encounters, that demand sustained presence — have also become a masterclass in slowness and attention. If John Berger taught us other ways of seeing,[8] we should also learn other ways of feeling and perceiving what is in our surroundings. The artist Carme Nogueira explored this concept in her intervention in the *Legado Cuidado*

6 Laboratorio de Antropología Audiovisual Experimental, "Damn Mine / Puta Mina".
7 Laboratorio de Antropología Audiovisual Experimental, "Libertad".
8 Berger, *Modos de ver*.

[Legacy Care] project,[9] which yielded seven modular pieces of recycled cement recreating a water channel situated in the lower part of the Parque del Pasatiempo in Betanzos, in northern Spain. The seven modules, each measuring 150×100×67 cm, enter into dialogue with the lost parts of the Parque del Pasatiempo's Neptune Fountain, which was part of that channel that fed into that ruined heritage. They are arranged – fictionally – in a mould of the lost pieces, in their negative, as if the fountain had disintegrated and its remains had been distributed across the country, converted into a negative, into a cast.

Unveiling the ancient water channel was more than a small gesture; it invited us to reflect on that human obsession with achieving mastery over nature and to ask ourselves what it means to live upon multiple layers of history. Beyond the work itself and what it reveals to us, this intervention to produce an artwork is the result of a participatory process addressing a local wound, namely, the deplorable situation of the iconic piece of heritage that is the Parque del Pasatiempo. In that enigmatic space, today contained in 10.000 square metres of the 70.000 square metres total it once occupied, we can still find works including the iconic "family tree of the capital", statues representing figures such as Charity, the Retiro pond, and the depiction of the Mosque of Muhammad Ali in Cairo, alongside the various grottos and caves dotted throughout this initiatory site. It is a monumental homage to the Galician emigration movement that sadly remains closed to the public. The intervention of the artist Carme Nogueira took place in a space of 60.000 square metres of the old park that is now a wasteland adjacent to a football field.

Participatory artistic processes also have the (often underestimated) virtue of transcending the division between expert and amateur knowledge. Rather than positioning technical or scientific know-how as the only valid form of knowledge, these processes underscore the value of the relational convergences from which other forms of knowledge and action can arise. The process started with the Association of Friends of the Parque del Pasatiempo. Given the authorities' neglect of the park, the association's members decided to come together to clean the tiles of one of the murals covered by the road. The people who participated in this association also undoubtedly fully embodied the role of *maintainers* of the park. In addition to activating the process and starring in it, the participants were generous

9 Concomitentes, "Legado Cuidado".



Land Commons project, ritual party designed by Asunción Molinos Gordo in Couso's communal woodland, October 2024. Photo: Andy Iglesias



enough to open it up to the general public, thus managing to spark the collective intelligence that is ignited when people meet and think together.

That is why *Concomitentes*, an entity that I chair, allied itself with them. (I was the mediator-curator of the *Legado Cuidado* project at the time.) *Concomitentes* is a non-profit organisation founded in 2018. Since then, it has advanced 15 artistic projects based on social and/or environmental needs, mediating between diverse groups of citizens who want to respond with a work of art to certain concerns and desires resulting from socio-environmental problems in their local area. Over the last eight years, we have worked with residents of multiple locations. They have been taking on the role of art promoters, leading the process and guiding the artist who will give a voice to their concerns in an artwork by means of participatory processes.

In Spain, *Concomitentes* is the organisation responsible for developing the *Nouveaux Commanditaires* protocol, through which more than 500 works of art have been promoted in Europe over the last 30 years. In addition to being involved in creating new European contemporary artistic heritage, we promote governance laboratories where participatory artistic processes become tools to strengthen democracy. We base what we do on a firm belief that communities have the ability to imagine and build their own socio-environmental future. Excellent proof of this is how *Legado Cuidado* eventually became a citizen movement that not only embarked on an artistic intervention in an area of 1.106 square metres and mobilised 469 cubic metres of land but above all allowed local people to be involved in repairing the dilapidated park.

All too often, we are left contemplating a cancelled future. Nostalgia can paralyse us. Or worse, it can blind us to the seeds that are beginning to sprout. And then we do not tend them properly because we cannot see them. But those seeds contain hope, perhaps new ways of connecting, a different kind of leisure than before, or novel ways of relating to one another. José Esteban Muñoz discussed this at length in *Utopía queer* [Queer Utopia], warning against the pragmatism of the present.[10] Only those who have a satisfactory present can afford to refute the future. He refers in particular to the most vulnerable and marginalised queer communities to highlight that when the present is not sufficient, the need for a future, a utopia, becomes ever more pressing. His understanding of art's capacity to anticipate those futures yet to come is inspiring: many artistic practices — performance, in particular — express futures that have not yet come into sight. That capacity

10 Muñoz, *Utopía queer*.

for anticipation allows us to experience — albeit for an instant — what it would be like to live differently. That moment opens a new "distribution of the sensible", and then another, and another ... And little by little, the world is imbued with other meanings that can frequently impact other aspects of life. We must care for and perhaps help to maintain that new growth. As Anna Tsing tells us, life emerges even from the ruins of capitalism. Even there, we can observe human beings' incredible capacity to mutate and adapt to their immediate surroundings. In the application for the European project Art Living Lab to Repair the Land (ALILAND), we posited that:

> [R]epairing is not just fixing; it is also giving new uses to what had apparently been abandoned and discarded. Numerous territories in Europe have undergone degradation due to intensified productivism. Contrary to the fatalistic discourse suggesting that nothing can be done about these areas, either because they are uninhabited or unattractive, due to the prevalence of abandoned industrial plants or the degradation of the landscape due to the exploitation of a mine, for example, it is necessary to initiate participatory projects aimed at repairing this fracture.[11]

We were interested in activating participatory processes in those fractures, but above all in their aftermath: what traces those wounds left behind, but more importantly, what new things have been emerging. In those cracks, new ways of being and doing things together were inevitably already being tried out; hence that time becomes a wonderful opportunity to encourage and problematize what is taking place. Without forgetting, of course, the damage that has been caused.

There is something that we should always advocate: allowing ourselves the opportunity to create something in common. We must open spaces where we can listen and debate together with that magic that art brings, which allows us to think while dancing, create while drawing or walk while engaging in dialogue. The scars that remain after a mine closes or where heritage is broken also tell of a narrative up for debate: what should be safeguarded and what should not, who were the culprits, who had suffered doubly the consequences of industrial intensification or the erasure inflicted by progress. That is why the ALILAND project seemed like a methodological experiment that could serve to create a work of art, an icon, but above all to ensure that the process itself favoured dialogue. The objectives of any participatory process must include strengthening the agency of local people so that the

11 Concomitentes, *Application Form – Part B: Art Living Lab to Repair the Land*, 2024.



A large part of the Concomitentes team during one of its inaugurations, February 2026.
Photo: Johan Fotografía y Video



participating communities can increase their capacity to advocate within the public agenda. To some, using art as a tool at the service of citizen agency might seem like instrumentalising it. But it is quite the opposite: it means reconnecting art with our own lives, rejecting doomed attempts to separate the two dimensions as if life and art were not part of the same whole.

Repair, understood in this way, is a long and unfinished process which does not have a final destination. Therein lies the power of the contribution that artistic mediation can make in reparation processes. As already stated in the article "Unfinished Mediation", it is a practice of contagion and collaboration that "leaves room for uncertainty, which opens spaces from which that collective intelligence can emerge".[12] For this reason, we are interested in those practices that are mainly based on dialogue, processes that invite participation and interact with scars not to close them and move on, but as a way of inhabiting them. The difficulty lies in how to inhabit this discomfort, to be hospitable to it, without this implying a self-absorbed joy that is paralysing, as opposed to productive, all the while keeping in mind that the inherently unfinished nature of such a process unfortunately removes any guarantee of its success.

And why a Parliament for Repair?

From Bruno Latour, we also learned that our democratic institutions were designed to represent only humans: in parliaments, only people speak.[13] Yet, as we have seen, ecosystems, animals, bulldozers, pneumatic drills and polishers act in the world and affect each other too. And if we were to propose that human beings, non-humans and things are all actors, subjects who act, could not the scar also be considered another actor?

The French philosopher proposed the Parliament of Things as an imaginary institution in which non-humans would have some form of representation. Not because things literally "speak", but because scientists, ecologists, technicians and engineers already act as spokespersons for non-human entities, and that work should have an explicit and legitimate place in political debate.

In its original sense, a parliament is a place where issues are debated and different voices are heard, where conflict is resolved not by force but with words. From this perspective, a Parliament for Repair would, above all,

12 Quiroga, "Unfinished Mediation".
13 Latour, *Nunca fuimos modernos*.

constitute a space for collectively discussing what has happened and what is happening, a meeting place for contentious memories. But it should be more than a space for debate. It must also provide a supportive space that encourages our imagination and our capacity to create new meanings. This parliament would not only perform a technical assessment of the damages; instead, it would also be able to glimpse emerging futures built from within the rupture and not on denying it, unlike in times past. That is why this parliament cannot be built in a day; it is a mechanism that requires time to allow memories to be honoured and latent wounds to be mourned, as well as to support the wishes of the collective.

A Parliament for Repair would also be a space where art is a method as opposed to an adornment. Confronted with apocalyptic images of sacrifice zones, this parliament proposes a different approach. It does not deny the seriousness of the damage; neither does it offer quick solutions. Rather, it affirms that even in disaster, there is the capacity to act, care, imagine, and live together. As much as it might seem like the closing lines of a story of dispossession, the situation of these territories is actually an event that opens up other unexpected futures.

But How Can it Be Created?

I could take advantage of one of my infrequent visits to my hometown to tell the current mayor that at *Concomitentes*, we have been experimenting with ways of getting together to plan works of art in common since 2018. That participants are not only artists but also mediators who help sustain the process – and, most importantly, citizens who express their wishes. I could also tell her that this Parliament for Repair could work like one of the participatory projects we started as part of ALILAND, funded by the European Commission. I could tell her that, as surprising as it might sound, the neighbourhoods of Barruelo de Santullán (Palencia, Spain), Wietstock (Ludwigsfelde, Germany) and Šibenik (Šibenik-Knin County, Croatia) worked together for two years to explore the consequences of mine closures, the contrast between industrial and local agriculture, and the energy-driven transformation of the landscape.

Then, I could tell her that, thanks to this accumulated knowledge, we were able to contribute to stopping my local area from being regarded as a sacrifice zone where nothing could be done. Perhaps I could explain that this is not an attempt to sweeten the bitter past of a place damaged in

very specific ways by very specific actors. I would also say that weaving something over the scars is not our goal. We intend to work from the inside out. But for that to happen, we had better have a substantial team. That is why the Parliament for Repair will be an invitation to do this together.

And after many conversations — hopefully in my own town someday — I would be able to say that we finally started a Parliament for Repair with the promise not only to restore what was, but to support what can still be in the future.

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04

Afterword

Sonja Leboš

After wor(l)d of Human-to-Human

Sonja Leboš, Co-Editor

> Nature is not our construction: it is transcendent, and it endlessly goes beyond us.
>
> (Latour, *Nikad nismo bili moderni*, 38. Author's translation.)

The opportunity to take part in the project *Art Living Lab to Repair the Land* (ALILAND) has been an important opportunity to expand my professional and personal horizons of what art in the public space and in the public sphere can be. The relevance of ALILAND is reflected in its selection for the publication *Tracing Constellations: Stories of Culture, Cooperation and Impact Across Creative Europe Cooperation Projects (2021–2024)*,[1] a publication by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) of the European Commission, the main funding body of the project. In the Croatian context, this recognition also guarantees strong local and national support. The publication brings forward 50 standout projects from the nearly 600 funded through the Creative Europe Cooperation Projects call between 2021 and 2024. ALILAND is one of 10 projects selected as an example of good practice in the field of green transition and sustainability. The importance of creating regenerative cultural models was therefore underpinned in a wide scope of diverse forms of artistic and cultural work.

Considering the times we are living in, the times of climate change accelerated by overall financialisation of space, overtourism, and, horridly, overt economies of genocide, that is, the military impact that has not been emphasised enough in discussions on sustainable Earth, ALILAND has also offered a momentum for intercultural exchange and learning. One can only regret that we did not have more time for face-to-face communication and human contact, which are so important today. While the flights of cultural workers are being counted, who counts the planes that bomb children?

That is why I will firstly reflect on the encounters we had within the project, first in Spain and then in Germany, as a kind of behind-the-scenes personal

1 European Commission, Favero, *Tracing Constellations*.

reflection, and then, I will return to the content of this book, trying to emphasise the thoughts of my colleagues that moved me and gave me food for thought. It has been a gratifying experience of putting together the theory and practice of feminist place-making, connecting political ecology with participatory art, and exercising the right to the city as the right of the citizenry to decide about their own environment in the form of Living Labs as proposed by the leading partner, Concomitentes. The format of Living Lab opened the path towards what perhaps is most important: repairing torn social fabric by recreating an "architecture of encounters",[2] bringing people together in fruitful intergenerational interactions. As Quiroga puts it: Living Labs are "micro laboratories of political participation".[3]

We, the representatives of the organisations carrying out the project, first met in person in Spain, during the symposium *Repairing the Earth*.[4] As ambitious as it might sound, these few days of exchange on themes such as *The Right to Repair as an Imaginary of Radical Democracy* (the title of the talk given by Mario Pansera) or how to employ *Autoethnographies for Collective Repair* (a lecture by Belén Sola), brought hope that there is a possibility to collectively think about repairing our broken planet.[5] Meeting the commissioners in Barruelo de Santullán and learning about their endeavour to bring forward the role of women in the mining community's past and present was an extraordinary experience, as was reading the book on the subject, issued by one of the commissioners: *Cuando la supervivencia se convierte en resistencia: Vidas entrelazadas de mujeres de la cuenca minera palentina (1934-1952)* [When Survival Becomes Resistance: The Intertwined Lives of Women from the Palencia Mining Basin (1934–1952)]. The book presents vivid evidence of the significance of interweaving various disciplines while overcoming transgenerational traumas of post-Franco Spain. Tapping into the territory, via a guided tour, was a gift of getting to know the soil and strata of one Spanish mine settlement, partially but not entirely abandoned. There are still citizens who care.

The workshop *Ecology of Care*,[6] organised in Berlin, was a marvellous occasion to meet the colleague mediators working in the German context. It brought us together, too briefly though, to exchange on rethinking care in

2 Concomitentes, "Reencantar vínculos ecosociales desde el arte", 80. Author's translation.
3 Quiroga, "Introducción", 11. Author's translation.
4 More here: https://www.uiii.hr/exhibitions/reparacija-tla.
5 See: Fitz, Krasny, *Critical Care*.
6 More here: https://artlivinglab.eu/blog/workshop-ecology-of-care.

times of ecological and social crisis, with intrinsically interlacing perspectives from feminist theory, urban practice, and artistic research.

The final event of the project in Šibenik is being prepared simultaneously with the writing of this text and the editing of this book. We have collectively worked on this book practically from the beginning of the project, thinking together how to present to our future audiences, not only what has been achieved, but also how to open paths for further collaborations on repairing what Man has broken. At the same time, we have been trying to stay patient with democracy (to paraphrase François Hers).[7]

Planet broken by Man – that is the bold truth that Elke Krasny pinpointed in her text, referring to Anna Tsing, a truth which is now no longer obfuscated by the quotidian misery of current affairs, enabling us to see clearly the danger of the "masculinist hubris of technofix"[8] while challenging patriarchal (lack of) imaginary and bringing us back to the right to care and repair, a notion central to feminist struggle. Krasny nurtures the imaginary of sustainability, showing what has been most relevant to this project: that overexploitation and abandonment are the two faces of one coin – though not the only one we must transact with. Only Man imposed. There are tools to be put to work once the ethics of care is promoted within the *politics of care*. Once...because now we live in a world where genocide is imposed as "politics". At the heart of politics is creating *polis,* not destroying it. And polis is about both "people care" and "earth care".[9]

After Krasny's theoretical framework, we opened the chapter for the mediators of the ALILAND project, to reflect on the Living Lab processes through which commissioner groups were consolidated and paths opened for further pondering on the matter of connecting place and art praxes. Because "[a]rt praxis can generate a 'politics of possibility' (in the spirit of Worsham and Olson 2007)".[10]

In her field report, Susanne Burmester, a long-standing mediator for citizen-commissioned art in Germany, describes the positive power of conflict and the potential of local knowledge to have a social impact, based on her conversations with people in the small village of Western Pomerania, Wietstock. From these conversations, which have been taking place for

7 Hers, "New Patrons / A History", 18.
8 See Elke Krasny in this volume.
9 Holmgren, *Permaculture: Principles and Pathways Beyond Sustainability*, 20.
10 Liboiron, "Using Art to Research Diverse Economies: Social Experiments in Re-valuing Waste", 61.

several years, and from the grassroots participatory approach, the artist Antje Majevsky envisioned “A Garden for People and Birds”, bringing human and non-human agents in a sort of a *parliament of repair* (as Fran Quiroga poetically conceptualised, see further in the text).

Alfredo Escapa Presa points to forms of dissent in Barruelo de Santullán – dissent that leads to political agency and narratives rooted in feelings of being excluded, but also to struggles to rewrite the history and safeguard feminist placemaking, correlating to the phenomenon of *cuerpo-territorio* that Krasny introduced at the beginning of the book while referring to the territorial community feminist Lorena Cabnal. As Alfredo puts succinctly: “From this political positioning, where there was no room for a grey area, the participants launched into the debates that eventually led to the selection of Todo por la praxis (TxP) as the artistic collective that would give material form to their desires”.[11] And that material form is ideated as “CUÉVANA”, “ a circular and welcoming space, conceived as a place for gathering, listening and dialogue”, where “circularity refers to the womb, the earth and the mouth of the mine, understood as spaces of interiority, extraction, support and survival. A container from which material is extracted, and from which life is also sustained”.[12]

In my mediator’s text (having been working within a micro-organisation, I have taken on multiple roles in the project), I tried to present to the readers the complex history of Šibenik’s Crnica, where imperial glacis and extraction overlap with recent de-industrialisation and (attempts of) decontamination of territory. The fact that I have been working in the area for more than 15 years was a guarantee of vivid discussions among people who trust each other. Those discussions brought us back and propelled us forward, to the work of Lana Stojićević, who strongly relies on auto - and social ethnography, embedding the achievements of her research into work that is both about visual politics and the performativity of space: we shape our surroundings, but they shape us back in return. Stojićević has envisaged the grim consequences of rapid (de) industrialisation as a performative multimedia installation titled *Towards the Mangan City*.

The next chapter invited Alexander Koch, Kristina Leko, and Fran Quiroga, to give their view on the New Patrons model, both in general and in its specific national contexts.

11 See Alfredo Escapa Presa in this volume.
12 Artistic Dossier, Energy Aftermath, Barruelo de Santullán. Mediator: Alfredo Escapa Presa. Artist: Todo por la Praxis.

Alexander Koch insightfully reminded us that the democratic project is young (which should also remind us that feminism is a very young concept, although we can look at it through Silvia Federici's eyes,[13] with *longue durée* magnifying lenses, or go beyond our Eurocentric fixating gaze and ask again and again: are democracy and feminism white-only projects?), that *participative* and *participatory* are to be differentiated, and that the ultimate sovereign in democracy is citizenry.

Kristina Leko's text is the longest in the book, as we wanted to leave space for a meticulous description of how the New Patrons model came to being-in-practice in Croatia, with Leko being its fierce propagator and advocate in the Croatian national context. When the model receives its deserved recognition in Croatia, as it has in Germany and Spain, it will be primarily Kristina Leko's merit.

Through the poetics of autoethnography, and drawing on Latour's parliament of things, Quiroga unlocked a wonderful syntagm: *parliament for repair*. His text hints at myriad possibilities for governing laboratories that we should introduce into our broken planet, which, let us admit it, has already been governed like one gigantic *polis*. In which some are citizens with the right to vote. And some ... are less than slaves. We are still very far from a democracy that includes non-human agents, as Latour suggests.[14] We still have not included humans.

Feelings are always (trans)local. We feel the world, and the world feels us in return. Talking about young projects: let us not forget, we have just started to learn that "[e]very species is the embodiment of experience with the world".[15]

"Laboratories, collections, computing centres, and centres of profit, research institutes and analytical offices mingle with manifold destinies of social groups every day. [...], although we construct society in its entirety, it lasts, goes beyond us, subjugates us, it has its laws, it is transcendent, just like Nature is".[16]

13 See: Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*.
14 Latour, *Nikad nismo bili moderni*, 146. Author's interpretation.
15 Goldschmidt, "Every Species is the Embodiment of Experience with the World".
16 Latour, *Nikad nismo bili moderni*, 43. Author's translation.

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Biographies

Susanne Burmester has been a mediator for the New Patrons in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern since 2017, as well as a founding member and chair of the Society for Citizen-Commissioned Art and Mediation [Gesellschaft für Kunst und Mediation im Bürgerauftrag e. V.]. Since 1993, she has worked as a curator and project manager for cultural initiatives on the island of Rügen and has accompanied citizen groups who commissioned works from Daniel Knorr, Antje Majewski, Christoph Schäfer and Amanda Piña.

Alfredo Escapa Presa is a mediator, creator and researcher of live arts and collaborative audiovisuals. His creations can be understood as places for rehearsing life, in which the piece created is not separated from the process or the collective that created it. His creations include work with the collective *La rara troupe*, which develops collaborative audiovisual projects on psychosocial distress, and the piece *Arròs*, on the eco-social crisis of L'Albufera in Valencia.

Alexander Koch has been a curator and author, lecturer and consultant since 1998, and gallery owner of the Berlin gallery KOW. He is the founding board member of the Neue Auftraggeber e.V. in Germany, and since 2017, he has been the director of the German New Patrons Society. Koch co-edited the book *Neue Auftraggeber. Kunst im Bürgerauftrag* (Spector Books, 2022). He advocates for citizen-commissioned art and networks actors worldwide.

Elke Krasny, PhD, Professor of Art and Education and Head of the Art and Education Program at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Elke Krasny is a feminist cultural theorist, urban researcher, curator, and author. Her work addresses ecological and social justice at the global present with a focus on caring practices in architecture, urbanism, curatorial work, and contemporary art. In 2011, Krasny received the Outstanding Artist Award – Women's Culture, and in 2023, the Gabriele Possanner State Prize, awarded by the Federal Ministry of Science and Research of Austria. Together with Urška Jurman, she initiated *Ecologies of Care*.

Sonja Leboš, PhD, is a cultural anthropologist, expert in cultural tourism, and art educator. She defended her doctoral thesis titled *City on Film, Film in the City: Zagreb 1941–1991, a Cultural-Anthropological Perspective*, in November 2022. She also studied set design and architecture in Prague and Zagreb. Her activities are in the domains of cultural and urban studies, education and the production in culture and art, visual and urban anthropology, and discourse analysis. Her artistic, curatorial, and scientific work tends to merge the liminal fields of narrative urbanism and visual arts, design, theory and

practice of performativity, film, and new media. Leboš is the founder of the Association for Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Research.

Kristina Leko is an interdisciplinary artist, documentary filmmaker, activist, educator and art producer based in Zagreb and Berlin. She is an early representative of *new genre public art* in Croatia, with a body of work dating to the early and mid-1990s. She has initiated and realised durational community art projects in working-class and farming communities in several countries, including Croatia, Austria, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands and the USA. In 2022, Leko co-initiated the national collaborative platform New Patrons of Croatia. Since 2013, she has held a permanent position teaching social art practice at the Berlin University of the Arts.

Antje Majewski's installations, paintings and video works deal with the way people interact with cultural objects, plants and ecosystems. With a particular interest in cultural and geobotanical migration, she explores oral histories and transformation processes as well as questions of ownership and self-efficacy. An important part of Majewski's work is collaboration with other artists, environmental and civic groups, and scientists. Works by Antje Majewski have been shown in a number of international exhibitions including those at Busan Sea Art Festival, Busan (2025); M HKA Antwerp, Antwerp (2024); Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2024); Lunds konsthall, Lund (2024); KunstHausWien, Vienna (2024); Almaty Gallery, Almaty (2023); Sauerland-Museum, Arnsberg (2023); Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn (2022); Kunstmuseum Thun, Thun (2021); Gropius Bau, Berlin (2019); Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin (2018); Center for Contemporary Art Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv (2016); Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, Warsaw (2016); Museum Abteiberg, Möchengladbach (2015); Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź (2014); Deutsche Bank Kunsthalle, Berlin (2013); Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt am Main (2013); Heidelberger Kunstverein, Heidelberg (2013); Villa Romana, Florence (2012); Weltkulturen Museum, Frankfurt am Main (2012); Kunsthaus Graz, Graz (2011); Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg (2008), and Kunsthalle Basel, Basel (2001). Since 2023, Majewski has been a professor of painting at the Braunschweig University of Art (HBK). She lives and works in Berlin and Himmelpfort.

Fran Quiroga is a transdisciplinary researcher whose interests lie at the intersection of activism, art, social participation, and the commons. He holds a degree in Political Science from the University of Santiago de Compostela and a master's degree in information technology. Quiroga also studied at the

universities of Cork, Minho, A Coruña, and Granada. He works as a mediator in the Spanish organisation New Patrons [Concomitentes]. He is the co-author and co-editor of numerous publications and works as a research and development specialist within the agroecology research network ReVOLTA.

Lana Stojićević (born in Šibenik, living and working in Split) is a visual artist working in the field of artistic research. She utilizes performative and staged photography, textile, costumes, and architectural models to explore themes, such as illegal construction, architectural and industrial heritage, environmental pollution, contemporary neo-style tendencies, devastation of cultural heritage, and the transformation of the landscape as a result of mass tourism. She graduated from the Department of Painting at the Arts Academy in Split in 2012. She works as an assistant professor at the Department of Art Education and Fine Arts of the Arts Academy in Split. She has won numerous professional awards, such as the third Erste prize, Youth Salon, Croatian Association of Artists, Zagreb (2022); the Radoslav Putar Award, Institute of Contemporary Art, Zagreb (2021); the third Ivan Kožarić Award, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb (2021); the Metro Imaging Award at the New East Photo Prize exhibition, Calvert 22 Foundation, London (2016); the Annual Award for Young Artists, Croatian Association of Artists, Zagreb (2015); the second prize of the exhibition Different Worlds: Young Contemporary Photography, Photon Gallery, Ljubljana (2015). Her works are included in public art collections, such as Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb; Prostor – Culture Hub Croatia, Split; Erste Bank, Zagreb; The State Museum; Exhibition Centre for Photography – ROSPHOTO, St. Petersburg, Museum of Fine Arts, Split.

Petra Šarin is an art historian, curator, and Teaching Assistant at the Academy of Fine Arts, University of Zagreb. She is a PhD candidate in art theory at the Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa. She was the Editor-in-Chief of the scholarly journal *Revista de História da Arte*. She has co-organised international conferences and research-education programs, edited scientific publications and authored several book chapters, including *Cartography of Resistance: Zagreb 1941–1945* (2022) and *The Trouble with 'Primitivism' in Iberian, Latin American and Other Semi-Peripheral Contexts* (2025).

Todo por la Praxis is an artistic collective founded more than 20 years ago, since 2020 they have been building an open community around a circle of collaborators coordinated by the duo that currently leads it: visual artist, researcher, and educator Jo Muñoz (CL) and architect and artist

Diego Peris López (ES). Their aim is to activate artistic practice as a driver of transformation, creating spaces and tools for critical reflection. The imaginaries they construct address various forms of dissent and political resistance through collaborative practices, amplifying narratives that intervene in public space. Their early projects focused mainly on citizen activism in public and common spaces as an alternative to the neoliberal city. Today, their interests have expanded to include extractivism in the Global North and dissident practices as political forms of resistance that construct new imaginaries. They have shifted from community-driven collaborative practices responding to immediate needs toward collaborations that open up spaces for critical thought. This approach enables the emergence of new transcultural subjectivities — as forms of emancipation and decolonization of dominant thinking — through processes of research, production, and action across both geographical and symbolic territories. Their projects employ agitprop, counter-advertising, and visibility campaigns or guerrilla communication tactics to question the models through which we inhabit places and their social consequences, such as gentrification, eviction, segregation, touristification, and social control. Today, these projects operate as critical devices that challenge such narratives through aesthetic-political counter-discourses. Their work has been featured in exhibitions at MNCARS (Spain), the Museum of Contemporary Art (MACRO) in Rome, the Center for Architecture in New York (USA), the Venice Biennale (Italy), the Fabra i Coats Centre d'Art Contemporani in Barcelona, the MD15 Biennial in Medellín, MACBA (Barcelona), the Ministry of Cultures (Chile), the Casino Luxembourg - Forum d'art contemporain, Bauhaus Lab (Germany), and Creative Europe's "Rebuilding to Last" (Denmark), among others.



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