SMART PLACES
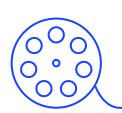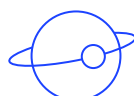
European stories on engaging audiences

Reflections and critical questions on the role of the digital

smARTplaces toolkit

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SMART PLACES

smARTplaces project partners

Dortmunder U, Germany.

Birmingham City University Centre for Media and Cultural Research, UK.

Oulu University of Applied Sciences, Finland.

National Museum of Liechtenstein, Vaduz.

Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Netherlands.

ZKM Karlsruhe Centre for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, Germany.

Azkuna Zentroa, Bilbao, Spain.

Etopia Centre for Art and Technology, Zaragoza, Spain.

Musée de Picardie, Amiens, France.

Many thanks to the contributors, colleagues and friends of smARTplaces

Dance and New Media Lab Conferencia 2018, Etopia

Table of Contents

Introduction

smARTplaces was a visionary, long-term European audience development project co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union with the aim of revolutionising the way culture and art can be perceived and consumed using digital technology and new forms of cultural mediation. The project ran from 2016 to 2020 and involved seven cultural institutions from seven countries along with two research partners. The project played host to a wide range of joint and local activities focused on new ways of making art and culture accessible, of increasing visitor participation and of digitally networking the European cultural landscape.

The project focused on developing and testing new approaches to audience development, audience engagement, co-creation, capacity building within the institutions, international exposure of art exhibitions and new creative works. With a coherent and multi-layered use of digital technology, social media, adaptive storytelling techniques as well as joint exhibitions and on- and offline activities, the partnering institutions became smARTplaces. That is, cultural spaces with features that enabled them to communicate with and engage audiences across Europe and within the international partner network. The project moved away from the passive visitor experience and instead connected audiences by creating a new digital European cultural space that is dialogic, linked, interactive, educational, integrated, accessible, audience engaging and involving.

smARTplaces goals

With the help of digital means, smARTplaces aimed at facilitating experiential digital and physical spaces that enabled new forms of communicating art, culture and information generally. Our goals were:

- to reach out to new target groups of visitors and to build long-term relationships with them;

- to utilise international synergies through international smARTplaces support and by linking exhibitions, exhibits and individual visitors;

- to make available media-competency education through the respective smARTplaces;

- to broaden curatorial creative spaces, developing trans-medial and multi-medial art installations, projects and content strategies transcending national boundaries while keeping in mind the respective curatorial goals and different visitor target groups.

About this toolkit

Partner fireside chat, Azkuna Zentroa ©Jerome Turner

Closing panel, 1st smARTplaces conference
© ZKM | Karlsruhe, Photo: Felix Grünschloss

In this document we reflect on the challenges we faced as we attempted to meet these goals. Our intention is to offer up our experiences as a reflective tool for cultural institutions, policy-makers and funders to consider how our use of digital technologies to develop audiences for culture and the changes we experienced might be further developed in future projects. We do this in the form of 'critical questions' that arise from our reflections and these are indicated in the text for each section. We will focus on four key areas of our experience, reflecting on our successes and highlighting where others may learn from the approaches we took.

Firstly, we will hear from our project coordinator, Britta Lerch, on the challenges of developing digital projects. Britta outlines how our work set out to explore the ways in which European museums and cultural institutions connect and interact with their audiences, becoming more inclusive and involving people in the reshaping of cultural centers and their role in social change. She offers insights into our experimental and innovative approaches and what we learnt from taking risks. We follow this with a conversation between digital consultant Dr Abhay Adhikari and Professor Paul Long who set out to unpick

the idea of audiences and how we measure their participation with culture. Have we built up 'myths' around our audiences? What do we expect from them and how can we reach out to those who aren't engaging?

In the final two sections we focus on two critical aspects of making large-scale projects such as smARTplaces a success. We begin by discussing our approach to collaborating and connecting with each other, focusing in particular on our U R Art project. We end our review by picking out some project highlights from smARTplaces that demonstrate the value of an approach that embraces risk, accepts the challenges of working with the digital, and sees value in working outwards from the local to the global.

Throughout this document you will hear first hand from project partners as they share insights and observations of their project journey. We hope that in reading this you can find some resonance with your own experiences and perhaps more importantly, use this document as the basis to support your own plans for developing and sustaining audiences for art and culture.

The challenges of developing digital projects in collaborative settings

smARTplaces project manager Britta Lerch, from Dortmunder U, sets out the challenges faced in developing projects focused on digital transformation and innovation in the cultural sector.

I would like to introduce you to our project, how we worked, what our mindsets were and how we managed the complexities of the project across institutions. No doubt the first question is why did we come together for smARTplaces? We realised that all the partners had some quite ambitious ideas on how they could approach the commonly shared challenges of cultural institutions in reaching new and more diverse audiences via digital means. A common understanding was that we need to start a (digital) transformation process and reevaluate our practices, but we didn't yet have the experiences to evaluate what good practices could look like for our institutions. So we came together and started defining those ideas and put them to test.

smARTplaces team in front of the Dortmunder U ©Roland Baege

Developing *smART* cultural spaces

The smARTplaces initiators ©Roland Baege

smARTplaces Steering Group meeting ©Roland Baege

Our key goal was to set up a project that develops long-term audience development strategies within a very close-knit European cultural network. We wanted to better understand how culture can be perceived using digital technology and new forms of cultural mediation. A deep understanding of audiences was a key challenge for us. Who are we talking to and what are their needs? What qualitative and quantitative data about audiences do we have to create strategies from? In addition, we wanted to transform our institutions into more participatory cultural places that transcend geographic and social boundaries by closing the gap between the virtual world and physical places themselves. We sought to turn them into interactive spaces that experiment with new forms of accessibility, communication and mediation. This was a significant challenge given how the speed of digital innovation goes a little bit against our aim for sustainability when we work. Thus, we realised that we had to initiate a culture change within our institutions in order to turn what are cultural spaces into smart places.

Offering a wide range of participatory experiences to diverse audiences has been a key element of smARTplaces, part of a process to support partners to become more audience centred and to manage the inner transformation process together with their audiences. Through the implementation of digital technology and digital storytelling strategies our goal has been to support a more accessible and inclusive culture. Therefore a great emphasis was placed on experimenting with new ways of transnational collaborations, new forms of participation, co-creation, art education and mediation through both local and joint formats.

①

① *Keeping up with the pace of change in the digital world can be costly and perhaps even distracting for cultural organisations. What is the right balance between embracing trends in digital innovation and valuing established modes of communication and participation?*

Shared goals, local solutions

What we quickly discovered in the planning process was that every institution is different. Even if we share the same goals, ideas and challenges, we have different identities, with varying offers. We have local influences, local co-dependencies with different stakeholders. We quickly had to come to the realization that anticipating change within the institution and embracing new technologies can never be reached by following a linear, yet traditional, process and trying to adopt the same solutions to each institution.

We had to think in more individual ways that fit the diverse local needs. Consequently we agreed to not focus on best practice, but rather focus on good local practice that thrives from European inspiration and experiences, but creates sustainability on a local level beyond the end of the project. What did we come up with then?

Creating a space for experimentation

Since 2016 we have completed almost 60 joint and local sub-projects. We tested and applied new strategies to audience engagement, built capacities and became better storytellers. It was a very human experience. It's the essence of how we worked, how we collaborated and how we learned from each other. I think the most human – and to be honest, the most crucial – experience we made, was trying to attempt to match the different perspectives.

At the beginning we thought that maybe we could find a one-size-fits-all solution for our 'digital struggles'. One that could be standardised and easily replicated across different institutions. We quickly realised that focusing on any kind of standardisation would weaken the local impact and make this project fail. So we rewrote the initial concept, went back to the drawing board, and gave ourselves the flexibility to change scopes during the development process of each and every single activity to the extent possible. Roles and responsibilities were adjusted, the focus of

activities reevaluated, sometimes with the need to scale them down.

These adjustments, although time-consuming and complex to plan, were the best thing that could have happened to this project. smARTplaces became an experiment, providing a 'safe' environment to develop, test and assess the effectiveness and acceptance of different forms of digital technology and tie it to local practices. Matching different perspectives among the partners ultimately wasn't the key point of this project anymore, matching the opportunities with each local identity was.

We had to let go of a lot of pre-conceptions about project work and making sense of it. All project members agreed that the technology itself should not be regarded as the driver of digital change, but rather as an enabling factor that can enrich visitor experiences in multiple ways. What should drive change, and did in our case, are the people involved.

(2)

(3)

smARTplaces Steering Group meeting ©Roland Baege

2nd Steering group meeting ©Harald Voelkl

Audience evaluation workshop by Dr Jerome Turner during ZKM conference
©ZKM | Karlsruhe, Photo: Felix Grünschloss

(2) *An easy presumption to make about digital technologies is that they tend to be global in nature and thus patterns of usage must surely be similar. What can we learn from local , or even hyperlocal, perspectives on the digital?*

(3) *What is the appropriate critical approach to the issues presented by digital change? Does a turn to the affordances of the digital in order to know and reach audiences present potential risks such as challenges in data management and safeguarding privacy?*

Learning and changing by doing

Within smARTplaces the people were at the heart of the process. A large proportion of the project has been spent on identifying and building capacities among staff members via educational formats such as hands-on staff training, seminars on audience segmentation, strategic process management, content development and management, as well as eLearning opportunities. Staff members from different departments experimented with more agile workflow management tools, gaining insights from different digital projects throughout the consortium and identifying areas of training needs.

We were introducing new methods that could be tested on existing exhibition formats, cultural educational offers, participatory projects or internal processes to see if they fit the local needs. In doing so they could contribute to the digital transformation of our organisations. What each and everyone involved in the project has shared is that they see the value of investing in change. They understand that this means letting go of established paths, even if the steps you can take seem somewhat small. They also understand that by embracing the international discourse, you can gain a boost to any transformation - personal and organisational. This required both an openness to different perspectives and a confidence to make brave decisions. In the cultural sector, especially the publicly funded one where change seems to sometimes take longer than in other sectors, this remains to be a novel, but future-proof trait.

Managing organisational culture change

Unlike other projects that focus on facilitating digital enhanced internal and audience development approaches via a top-down-process, this project was initiated by middle management, within marketing operations, aiming to engage the entire institution in order to create a sense of ownership among participating staff. All project partners realised that the transformative nature of the project requires a holistic approach, that equally allows for fostering internal capacity building measures, knowledge exchange and the redesign of internal work processes.

But sometimes we had to accept that funded projects don't always leave enough room for change themselves. You naturally have to work towards a set of outcomes defined in any grant application, and even experimental projects like ours have to fulfill the proclaimed need to forecast the outcome. A tricky task, especially when we did not initially know how to measure the value of change properly.

It also became clear that working on an international project within established organisational processes can be a limiting factor as well. Working on smARTplaces sometimes felt like working on a different planet than the rest of the organisation. In a project environment you always face the challenge that projects are naturally add-ons to your day-to-day duties.

They are somewhat unknown entities that add to the already existing workload for team members. Therefore they are the first thing that attention gets drawn away from when things get busy, when teams change or when departments get reorganised.

As the coordinator of the project it's inevitable that you will never live up to all the expectations and ambitions you initially had. Project management means more than just coordinating tasks. The most important lesson I have learnt is to let go of formalities and control and instead trust in the competencies of my colleagues

smARTplaces team at Azkuna Zentroa 2019

around Europe. This trust has been repaid with renewed energy after each meeting to keep on working together, with a fresh drive that would sustain the project from its inception to its close.

Creating the conditions for success

However, what we have come to realise in reflecting on our experiences is that projects need more than just dedication, inspiration and an open mindset. There are two other key conditions that complex projects need in order to succeed. Firstly, they need a strong and resilient internal support system and organisational structure that sees values in working on externally-funded, collaborative projects. Secondly, they require new leadership models that leave room for experimenting, for learning, and yes, for failing as well. Such leadership approaches need to also see the value in anchoring this knowledge in a sustainable way across the organisation.

smARTplaces didn't necessarily change our organisations but it did change mindsets, it did influence workflows and it became a catalyst for transformation processes that will live on beyond 2020. Embracing the value of human (learning) experiences with digital and the dedication to learn from each other is what has made this international team so unique and productive and the outcomes so sustainable.

Technology will continue to rapidly change but instead of focusing on what is digitally possible right at this moment, focusing on creating meaningful experiences while building skills and infrastructures will enable us to more easily and confidently adjust to coming innovations. Our experiences from the last four years have already proven themselves to be one of the most valuable assets we can take away from this project. Investing in experimenting with a range of new approaches made us more resilient and proactive in our day-to-day work. This alone is one of the best results this project could have reached and has proved timely given the impact of Covid-19 on the cultural sector which has increased the need for radically new concepts for engaging with our audiences and communities.

"We learnt that the processes of change management must involve permanent staff of the organization, and at all levels of it, to have an effective root in the daily activity of it. Internal communication is a basic tool in the transmission and learning between some parts and others of the organization, and without it, many of the changes that are applied or learning that promote projects like these do not reach the core of the institution. Despite the differences between institutions, when there is adequate management and tools, it is possible to work in a coordinated manner."

———————————————————— Isabel Cebrián, Etopia

The main challenges for us were in implementing a very wide project on a local scale and to ensure we involved all the team of the museum. The project might seem kind of 'blurry, difficult to grasp at the beginning, but there were some concrete actions that helped the team to jump in. The main benefit for us has been the creation of an european network and the best practice exchanges with other professionals. We had learned that each structure, though different, had some common concerns, and the solutions to address those issues were different. On a local scale, smARTplaces was a good leverage to test some projects we would probably not risk on our own.

———————————————————— Aurélie Maguet, Musée de Picardie

We became involved in the project in order to help us bridge the gap between audience engagement we were already doing at the museum and what we might gain from the use of digital technology as an enabler. We wanted to find more opportunities to engage with our audience as well as them engaging with one another. This remains a huge challenge. We have definitely made progress, putting together a much better social media strategy, developing content for different channels as well as getting in house knowledge on how to use technologies such as live streaming and having direct online contact with the audience. Our digital strategy has improved in a way that we have a more clear sense in what works well and what doesn't.

———————————————————— Mariët Erica, Van Abbemuseum

A project like smARTplaces can only function as an impetus and starting point as it has raised awareness of the gap between the digital vision and practical implementation. Without further investment in capacity building and experimental projects medium-sized cultural institutions must be apprehensive about getting further behind in terms of digitisation and digital literacy. All participating institutions will have to reflect on how they will continue to shape and lead the ongoing digital transformation within their institution. In concrete terms, this means both a strategic and structural reorientation and the development of a constant willingness and capacity for change within the institution to prevent smARTplaces from being a mayfly or just another digital project without a sustainable impact.

———————————————————— Jasmin Vogel, Kulturforum Witten, formerly Dortmunder U

The 'myth' of the audience

In this discussion with Dr Abhay Adhikari, Professor Paul Long reflects on some of the challenges faced in understanding audience behaviour and measuring their engagement. Professor Long led the smARTplaces evaluation team on behalf of Birmingham City University and here he problematises the idea that there is a one-size-fits all solution to understanding the relationship between audiences and cultural institutions. Abhay Adhikari has been a key part of the smARTplaces project, supporting the team in their understanding of digital identities. Abhay works globally with organisations to help them develop resilient digital identities. He also manages a number of Smart City initiatives that focus on individuals, communities and neighborhoods.

Partner spotlight, 3rd conference ©Roland Baege

Abhay Adhikari, Cultural Lab Forum, Azkuna Zentroa

Prof Paul Long at the 1st Steering Group Meeting
©Roland Baege

PL: My name is Paul Long I'm a professor of Media and Cultural History at Birmingham City University. My role in the project dates back to its inception. We came on board out of interest in the research and evaluation aspect of the project and personally I have an interest in the cultural sector. In particular, the digital take on this project is quite important and the attempt to engage new audiences is a long-standing thread of cultural development. In one sense there's no 'hard to reach' audiences but I've been involved in several projects that were exactly about hard to reach audiences.

AA: Can you tell me what excites you about smARTplaces as a project?

PL: Well there are a number of things. First of all there's the chance to meet and be part of a project of such disparate organisations from across Europe. I think learning about the different ways in which cultural institutions work across Europe is particularly rewarding. I think the attempt to work at a pan-European level in terms of generating audiences through the digital is quite important. Clearly there are things happening locally for the partners which are very physical but one of the opportunities of the project is trying to galvanize engagement from outside of the borders for each of the partners.

AA: You mentioned the word audiences, so as a researcher how would you unpack this, let's call it a buzzword, 'audiences', what does that actually mean?

PL: Yes, it's a strange term isn't it because I've been using 'audiences' but I don't tend to think of people going into museums or cultural institutions as audiences. It sounds too passive. I've certainly taken to thinking of the people engaging with the project as 'smart' audiences but I'm particularly interested in the people who don't engage and why that is. All of the partners are interested in expanding their visitors.

④

AA: This starts to sound interesting. So you're saying this project is equally about discovering people who don't normally engage with cultural institutions?

PL: That was part of the big deal about the formulation of the project. Because why would we just want to reach the people already coming in? Just to enhance their experience by offering them digital? Rightly or wrongly, one of the advantages of

④ *How are audiences imagined by the cultural policy objectives that inform project work? Whether conceptualising them as citizens or consumer 'types', it suggests an impoverishment. Perhaps there's a way to move beyond this towards a more critical concept of 'smartness'.*

the digital is it's assumed to engage younger audiences who may find new ways into very established, long-standing institutions, like museums and galleries. I'm particularly interested in aspects of culture justice, public institutions justifying and demonstrating their utility to give everybody an opportunity to engage with what you offer.

AA: Those are really interesting questions. Is that what you are bringing into the project can you tell me a bit more about your role?

PL: First of all there's a chance to research good practice and best practice that's out there. You can imagine, the ideal of the smart place or the smart city, all of those things are pretty well established. The conceit of the project is that they've got this nice line of the 'art' in 'smart'. But the switched-on connectedness of the opportunity of the digital collaboration is the key thing. The job I've got is to evaluate: is it happening, is it working? Is it delivering on what project set out to do and to what extent?   ⑤

AA: Isn't that a challenge because the way you've described the project so far it seems to be completely open-ended with no boundaries.

PL: Well it's got a set amount of activities so there are collaborations between the partners. There are the all-encompassing aspects of: building the websites, sharing apps, the advantages of what has happened for the partners locally, the building, the infrastructure, the establishment of Wi-Fi in institutions, things like that. So at a basic level as an evaluator one can simply tick off yes, that has happened, things have been built, money has been spent. The quantitative and qualitative insights I think are the interesting things here about the challenges of how you manage a project like this, which isn't just about the intellectual inspiration. For all of our commonality across the EU there are distinctions between how things are done and how they operate.

AA: What do you hope to get out of this? I mean you hit the nail on the head by explaining that even in the group of partners you have they represent so much diversity. Maybe I'm oversimplifying it but what do you hope to get out of this experiment and what do you think this can inform?

There has been something of a digital turn in cultural policy. The 'smart' agenda for cities and culture speaks to those institutions seeking to innovate and to find new ways of connecting with audiences via digital mechanisms. But what are the evaluation tools that we can use to understand 'smart' participation?   ⑤

PL: Having gone through quite a major project in the UK where we're engaging with people's cultural lives, I hoped this was going to be both a chance to explore how cultural institutions work to realise this opportunity. I also wanted to learn something about European audiences. That is, the different types of audience segmentation that they work with, what they imagine their audiences are, what the variety of audiences there might be. I'm interested in understanding the ways in which you can build relationships with audiences that are meaningful and not just a kind of consumer transaction approach.

AA: What I understand is that this project has two parts from a research perspective: it is understanding how institutes themselves function, which I think is really interesting, and then also trying to, can I say this myth of audiences? Do you feel that there's a myth of who the audience is?

PL: There is, partly because the audience is a conceptual thing as much as a reality. There is clearly an understanding and a knowledge to be developed about the realities of who comes into a gallery or museum. I think one of the challenges – if not myths of audiences – is do we end up producing a consumerist model? Or even worse than that, a kind of psychologist model that's not really about psychology but it's a kind of list of labels about what you can hypothesise is your audience. Or do you generate some really rich insights into the preferences and needs of audiences?

AA: There's always the temptation to create frameworks and methodologies and formalised procedures and what I really like about what you're saying is that it has to be a period of discovery, even a research framework. With that hat on, as a researcher, what would be your advice to other people in the field – academic or non-academic – for saying, maybe we can develop a framework?

PL: If I were making recommendations for anyone working on European projects, I would say be prepared to not produce a one-size-fits-all approach. There needs to be some adjustments to take into account local factors. It seems to me that it's possible there are only a handful of cross-project reference points, in the sense that it needs a bit of buy-in from each of the partners to translate the principles one can bring along, in order to adapt them and put them into place. It's an advantage but also a disadvantage for European projects that English is the lingua franca and we're already seeing this in the sense of some of the products of the projects have a linguistic challenge because if you're delivering things in English how do you address your hard-to-reach audience who's not bilingual or trilingual?

AA: But not being a native Spanish speaker, as an example, does that give you a level of objectivity?

PL: It might be objectivity but it might also be a desire to push colleagues to explain a bit more about what it is they're seeking to do. So translation is a big word in this project as you can imagine, this is a practical dimension. We have to understand much more about what the local challenges are. Just by way of example, some of our partners are part of a local government bureaucracy in a way that some of the others are not. It affects their ability to be fleet of foot or put things into action that is not as flexible as some of the other partners.

AA: So what skills have you had to learn whilst on the project?

PL: I think there's a degree to which the skills you expect to already have as a researcher needs to be accentuated. It's not possible to come in and tell people what to do. My colleagues or I are not able to go out to each of these institutions to do an on-site, bespoke adaptation of research methodologies for audience engagement. We need to do this from afar, so there's a bit of understanding that's needed. You can imagine institutions need quite a lot of time if you're going to study them or work with them. Even though the project is quite sizable, what you can actually do in the project involves quite a lot of innovation and flexibility.

AA: I guess my question to you is what innovations have you come up with?

PL: One of the things I think has been really useful is generating more qualitative insights from the partners. They're very good actually in narrating aspects of what they intend to do because their cultural institutions have very strident perspectives on what their mission is, which I like. That's one of the advantages of the project: some people have very particular commitments that they like to express. It's one of the challenges of being an evaluator when you're pushing people to just deliver figures that you just end up being in a bureaucratic relationship. But it's quite a positive thing to hear the specific cultural commitments that individuals have. So I don't think we've necessarily innovated, indeed, we've had to rein in the potential for innovation. I would like to see much more of an imagineering of what the audience is that they want to engage with. I'd like to see more innovative ways of capturing feedback.

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Whilst quantitative measures are often central to understanding the success of projects, we also need to hear qualitative narratives to understand the role that local cultural contexts play in shaping the success of failure of initiatives. How can we ensure that we don't lose the 'voice' of partners in our evaluation design?

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AA: I guess what it is also saying to me is that as a researcher engaging with this project you seem to be very comfortable with letting go of what normally you would have been able to control in terms of language access and there's been a big element of building relationships as well.

PL: With the type of audiences I've worked with, access is a major challenge. You know I spent a year or so in inner-city Birmingham and Manchester trying to engage audiences. Not to get them to go to places, but to research their preferences. People aren't necessarily that responsive not because they're hostile but because you might just be barking up the wrong tree. There's an issue of how you communicate. The things you're interested in may not be the things that they're particularly interested in even though it matters to you because funds are there.

AA: Is it a case of the same thing being replicated in other European cities but with a different cultural damage?

PL: Well everybody in theory has to do the same thing which is simply: identify your audience and tell us how many of them are coming. Not justify what the project has spent, but think about how this is going to be sustained and where it's leading. That's quite a big project even though it sounds very simple. If you've got a big open space you've got a 100 people with clipboards or iPads going around asking them questions, people don't necessarily want to answer questions because it's not why you come into a gallery or a museum. Bothering people to find out personal details is quite an imposition.

AA: Not to end with a cliché but is it fair to say that nothing is as simple as what it seems? Is that a big lesson for this?

PL: Well I think so and I think in many ways, simple principles are the watchword of this project. Now don't get me wrong, that doesn't mean the project is simple because there's actually some really smart creative things happening, but in order to be able to gather insights and work upwards from there it's more sophisticated and nuanced ideas. I think we need some simple approaches.

AA: Great, I think that's a really good point to end on and thank you very much.

You can hear the full conversation between Professor Paul Long and Dr Abhay Adhikari, as well as other conversations and podcasts, on the smARTplaces Soundcloud page:

Collaborating and connecting – a conversation about U R ART

In this section we set out how our approach to collaboration and connectivity as a network led us to create, in September 2019, the joint U R ART event. Working across seven cultural spaces in five countries, we brought together a series of diverse cultural experiences that explored European identity. Our intention was to engage with audiences through a pursuit of open questions and inquiry, rather than providing simplistic answers. U R ART was to be the spark for informed and well-grounded conversations about issues of European identity and also to explore such identities in local contexts. We were drawing on our existing knowledge about audiences and the experience we had in engaging with them. U R ART didn't do away with what had gone before but built on it.

U R ART set out to engage with new, as well as existing visitors, hoping to inspire a general sense of curiosity across all audience groups. The topic of European identity was seen as a space of colliding perspectives but one with a need for moderating narratives. The challenge came in facilitating positive and constructive perspectives while fostering a healthy and open debate that does not mute, but integrates opposing voices. For the smARTplaces project partners, the event would help to nurture enthusiasm and motivation about collective ideas, joint and co-creative processes and the notion of 'taking part' in shaping local initiatives as well as the concluding event.

In the conversation below, we hear from project partners about what they set out to achieve through U R ART and what they learnt from the collaboration.

3D mapping by storyLab kiU at U R ART, Dortmunder U ©Roland Baege

U R ART at Azkuna Zentroa

U R ART at Azkuna Zentroa

The Democracy Machine, ZKM

Interviewer: Can we talk first about how U R ART was developed and what it aimed to achieve?

Britta Lerch, Dortmunder U: When we formulated U R ART, it was defined as an activity that actually needs to be visible from outside the institution, <u>so the people who never intended to take a step inside a museum or cultural place feel more comfortable in perceiving activities there.</u> We always talked initially about media facades, projections, going outside to the communities, to the city, to your urban spaces around, to step out of your own comfort zone as well. Even though we didn't work that much with media facades due to technical restrictions, everyone I think developed new ways in addressing these communities, so it still found its way into the presentations.

⑦

Bárbara Epalza, Azkuna Zentroa: We spent a lot of time really thinking about what kind of project we wanted to plan and we really wanted not only to do a project just as an event, we wanted to do a deeper project regarding, really, the audience. The main goal in our case was how can we work with the identities of our audience, and how can we better engage? We wanted to ask: 'Do you feel that, really, you belong to your neighbourhood, so that you're really from your neighbourhood, or do you feel that you are closer to your city, to your region or to your country, or to your continent or to the world?' We wanted something easy for everybody, and comfortable, and suitable for everybody.

Interviewer: The official opening of U R ART took place at the Dortmunder U on Saturday the 21st of September and was broadcast live on the internet. Partners called in from all over Europe, which must have been quite an intense operation. How might you advise others to take something like this on? How did you pull it off?

Britta: By trusting in a technical environment that sometimes lets you down but in this instance worked very, very well. And I think we presented the way we collaborate also virtually together in a very nice way, and it was a good starting point to get a glimpse of the diverse range of activities that were taking place all across Europe and bringing together different perspectives of Europe, of European identity and what local communities think about Europe and how they interpret it.

Interviewer: Azkuna Zentroa was the first to launch a U R ART activity on the 4th July 2019 and nearly 13,000 people participated in the installation. That's a huge number. Did you expect that?

How can we collectively challenge audience perceptions of cultural institutions? Should we be thinking beyond seeing this as a local issue and instead recognise this as part of a broader sectoral need to create spaces that audiences feel 'comfortable' (or perhaps 'uncomfortable') in? ⑦

Bárbara: Well, to be frank we didn't know very well how the people would react, because we were asking for very active participants to be participating in this installation. And it was really amazing to see how the people were really ready to ask quite serious questions as what kind of characteristics confirm your identity? It's not very easy sometimes to answer this question. But we saw that in a playful way, and also from the macro view, people wanted to see what the differences of the others were. So it was really brilliant for us. It has been a very great experience for us.

Interviewer: What was the reaction from the public like?

Bárbara: The people really wanted first of all to understand what they wanted to do, and ask a question as to which kind of character do you identify with? We can see that even people from 18 years old or 80 years old had the same questions, so it was very interesting to see how the people reacted, how the people wanted to draw. Not only the kids, also all people wanted to draw, which is very important. And how they took it seriously also. To answer this question and also to see the reaction when we projected all these results on a visual piece of art, as it was, this data on the big screen. So the people, I think they were quite conscious about their participation and the importance of being part of this art piece, this art work.

Interviewer: In Etopia you had the Urban Art Fest and you worked also together with a lot of young audience. Performers, illustrators, dancers, rappers. What was that like?

Juan Pradas, Etopia: For us it was a big opportunity to try to enhance our audience. We have a tech profile, usually most of our users or visitors are makers who are somehow engaged in technology. So this was a very good opportunity to link with neighbouring districts, with immigrant communities and with the young. We have our big profile of activities for kids who are under 14 and for adults. But there's a gap in this age between 13, 14 and 20. That's why we customised this U R ART activity into a series of events and performers who were addressed specifically to those ages. We started in July with a rap workshop. We worked very intensively with different district communities of young people to create a kind of European identity. It is something which at first sight maybe doesn't sound very appealing to them, but we finally were very happy with the result, the outcome of the whole process, because we have lots of performance videos, rap singers who have created songs and different performances related to that.

Interviewer: Turning to the Musée de Picardie, it was very special because you opened your doors in the middle of renovations. So for people it must have been very special to be able to visit the museum.

Aurélie Maguet, Musée De Picardie: Yes, although actually they couldn't really visit the museum because only a small part of the museum was open for the smARTplaces event. Even though we had done some guided tours ahead of reopening in March 2020, we had never hosted an event on the closed site. But for this special event we had 1000 people during two afternoons. What was put on display for them was also a way for us to relate to the museum but also to relate to the team of the museum. What was nice was hosting the people and to create, once again, contact with them and interaction with them. They were really curious about how the team had worked during this time of being closed. We could also give them a glimpse of the other smARTplaces projects because we showed the livestream of the U R ART events all afternoon. They could see that even if we were closed, we were connected to other structures and we still were making projects.

Interviewer: At Van Abbemuseum you hosted many activities as part of the U R ART Festival. Many activities. Can you highlight one?

Mariët Erica, Van Abbemuseum: What I really liked about the U R ART Festival was that it was really a day that a lot of the programming came about in collaboration with audiences or with groups of artists that we collaborated with. U R ART really gave us a sense of collaboration. This is a day by our audience, for our audience, with our audience. If I have to highlight one, because we had so many, what I really liked was this one installation workshop where the audience could really participate in making an art installation. They could choose an object that was there, and then they recorded a sound that they felt would go with that object. And they had all these different things that they could make sounds with, which was a lot of fun. Then they would actually become part of the exhibition and sort of be an artist themselves. And the installation grew throughout the day. So yes, it was a very nice, interactive artwork.

Interviewer: The National Museum of Liechtenstein invited visitors to participate in a project as well. You had contributions from Austria, Lichtenstein, the Netherlands, Germany, Portugal, China, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Israel, Switzerland, Hungary, France and the USA. How did people respond? Did they automatically understand what you were doing?

Vlado Franjević: I think there were visitors from some other countries also. When we hosted the exhibition, '300 Years of the Principality of Liechtenstein', we were free to come to our visitors and ask them, if they may be nice, to work with us on our project. And some of them of course said, "Yes, why not? Let's do that." So it was very interesting communicating with all these people, and I am very much grateful for the reactions. Yes, we are very happy with the whole project.

Interviewer: At Dortmunder U, you were kind of similar, also a very packed programme. If you had to single out one activity what would it be?

Britta: We had more than 15 activities but I would choose two, because these things represent the range of activities that took place. One of them was an activity called *My Friends in the World*, which had actually started in May, asking kids and families to tell the story of their best friend somewhere in the world. We recorded more than 100 podcasts and stories, basically very personal emotional stories, and they were put on a map that you could discover virtually but also see the written stories, hear the stories as a podcast. We were impressed on how global everyone already lives and seems, and how welcoming or how connected even kids are these days. This was, I think, one of my favourites. Another favourite was the impressive 3D mapping we projected onto the façade at the Dortmunder U, in collaboration with the StoryLab kiU of the FH Dortmund, who created a fictional and non-fictional visual story and projected it onto the outside of the building which just showed it in a completely different light.

Interviewer: And what do you think connected the projects on U R ART?

Juan: I think all of the projects have one thing as a characteristic. They are embracing specific communities in many different realms, such as you have many of your different users, visitors, kids, older people, in our case people who are between 15 and 25, and all want different uses. But they are all, all of the activities are somehow tailored for communities.

⑧ **Aurélie:** A common ground about the U R ART project is that we all had the same command, the same context, the same identity, with work related to our own structure. What I find really interesting is that we all had the same starting point but we all ended up doing something completely different in the duration, in the way people interact.

Isabel Cebrián Zarranz, Etopia: I was thinking that one thing that we all had in common is that everybody went out. Meaning Dortmunder U went to the fresh air, to the side of the building to showcase these artworks. Because of the different situations we had in-house, in our houses, we had to step out. We had to take the contacts out to the door of the building so the young people won't feel that they don't belong to the space. We wanted to make it in the open so everybody passing by could join the party. Everybody in a way stepped out to show, to have U R ART and to make it bigger.

⑧ *Effective collaboration has been at the centre of smARTplaces' ethos. What is the right balance between ensuring collaborative briefs are open enough for local interpretation, yet give sufficient direction to enable them to speak to collective concerns?*

Interviewer: Finally, looking back on U R ART, what would you say that you learnt from collaborating in this way?

Aurélie: For us in Musée de Picardie, it was just a step of accepting to have a different point of view speaking about the museum, and speaking about its collection. Also, the people that would be speaking about the museum and its collection and identity and whatever it makes them think about. One of the really nice legacies of U R ART is to create a space where we had the opportunity to mix different points of view. I think that is for us what is a common ground actually of all the projects we manage.

Juan: In our case, what we have learned is we are much more aware of our weaknesses. I'm not sure that we are 100% sure which is the right way to address all these weaknesses of course, but we know that all these developments are much more complicated than we thought three or four years' ago, how to bring people, how to bring new communities, new users to our building, how to communicate, to make all the communication efficient of all our activities, basically engaging to new communities. This is something that is basically about learning from each other in the project.

Britta: I think what is a common narrative here is that smARTplaces is nudging everyone to think differently and to approach things differently. I think this is a new and different mindset that we acquired and tested out in local activities. Seeing differently and approaching differently makes itself free from old learnt behaviours and how they did things before this process. We have a safe test space here. It gives you some sort of form of control, security that, okay, we have a framework of U R ART where we can test things out and even fail with them or find our own weaknesses or identify new challenges. I think this is something that we can all hopefully agree on.

Interviewer: Well, thank you everyone for your opening up about this project.

U R ART at Liechtenstein National Museum ©Sven Beham

U R ART installation, Dortmunder U ©Roland Baege

U R ART was developed as a 'safe space' to experiment with ways to increase the visibility of cultural institutions to new audiences. What organisational and cultural challenges might be faced when planning projects like this and how can persuade funders of the value of failing? ⑨

Summary

U R ART marked an important step toward building meaningful encounters through art, people, and stories through the creation of a joint narrative that integrated different perspectives and contributions in a constructive way. Making use of digital technologies, U R ART provided a transparent and engaging view on art and culture, empowering audiences to tell their story within the context of cultural spaces. The visualization and sharing of these individual narratives thus provided a versatile and individualised context for artists, visitors, and participants alike. Just over 20,000 people visited U R ART events and on social media platforms the event reached over 2 million European citizens. The key value of the project at a local level is that it allowed for audiences to reflect on their own European identities in the context of their local cultural institutions. For the project more broadly, U R ART gave partners a real sense of collaboration and connectedness with each other but without losing focus on the key issues of the need to develop audiences. As Mariët Erica from Van Abbemuseum put it: "This is a day by our audience, for our audience, with our audience."

U R ART festival, Van Abbemuseum

Identidata, Azkuna Zentroa

U R ART at Liechtenstein National Museum ©Sven Beham

U R ART activities

- Azkuna Zentroa presented Identidata, a participatory installation produced together with Azkuna Zentroa – Alhóndiga Bilbao. Identidata reflected on the role that different factors play in the construction of identities in a scenario of continuous globalization.

- The interactive festival U R ART at the Dortmunder U was part of the DEW21 Museum Night, offering the opportunity to take a new look at the U and experience it in a new way.

- Etopia Center for Art & Technology organised the Etopia Urban Fest focused on urban culture and young makers. Trap and Rap performances, open air mural painting and digital art were presented by young creatives from Etopia's laboratories and projects.

- Liechtenstein National Museum collected contributions from guests coming from Austria, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Germany, Portugal, China, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Israel, Switzerland, Hungary, France, the USA and other countries, inspired by the exhibition 1719 – 300 Years of the Principality of Liechtenstein.

- At Musée de Picardie, the artists Cléa Coudsi and Eric Herbin were invited to create a work in response to the museum being closed for renovation. The resulting work was a journey starting inside the closed museum, a path composed of wandering, exchanges, crossings, a journey through space and time.

European Heritage Days at Musée de Picardie

Etopia Urban Fest ©Maria Blasco + Guillermo Borrel

- The Van Abbemuseum offered a day full of new ways to discover the museum and see it in a new light: practicing yoga in the museum, taking part in a 'meme workshop by international students', a multi-sensory tour, a renewed theatrical tour, as well as various workshops. The museum choir performed a special piece and there was a European-themed Art Market.

- At ZKM Karlsruhe, the artist Adam J. Scarborough's The Democracy Machine! explored democracy through the exchange of different viewpoints and finding joint solutions.

Etopia Urban Fest ©Maria Blasco & Guillermo Borrell

Etopia, Mural Painting, Urban Fest ©Maria Blasco & Guillermo Borrell
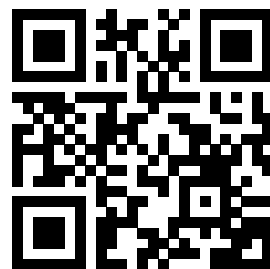

U R ART at Van Abbemuseum ©Marcel de Buck

My friends from around the world, U R ART at Dortmunder U ©Roland Baege

Creating smART projects

In this section we offer insights into some of the projects which we consider exemplify the smARTplaces approach which was built on established local identities, experiences and activities that can be enabled as exchanges and joint activities by digital means. Each local partner offered as a starting point for research and development its own proof of concept from practice that was then 'shared' and tested across the partnership. Throughout, the core principle has been one of cultural flexibility and adaptability. Through smARTplaces we have explored not only a more expansive digital shift in cultural practice and experience but also focused on testing new strategies and approaches. Digital technology, digitisation and digitalisation has not always been our starting point in these projects. Of course our aim has been to transform museums into 'smart places' but this requires an initial address to the underlying issues of cultural mediation and community engagement.
From there we can ask: what does the digital bring to develop the reach and impact of our work? To be successful in this also requires attentiveness to issues of change management and experimentation in storytelling, an area we have had a strong focus on.

(10)

Scan to watch more impressions from smARTplaces projects and conferences

Through the projects set out below, and in common with the wider range of projects we undertook, partners have expanded their ideas of consumption beyond the passive: exhibitions have been made open to share audience comments and dialogue via social media, project-wide art education seminars placed online for those wanting to explore further, and content digitally accessible throughout the smARTplaces community via the creation of a mobile app. A key development for the project can be described as a movement from a form of technological utopianism or determinism, in which cultural organisations expect the digital to provide direct solutions to problems, towards a more experimental, prototyping approach in the use of new technology and in designing cultural experiences more generally.

Enabling smARTplaces to become a knowledge sharing space for discussing local ideas in a broader European context has been a key outcome for our project. How will you place knowledge exchange at the heart of your activity to ensure that cultural institutions can learn from each other and remain resilient in challenging times?

(10)

#TheWorkofArt - Live Dialogue Series

From February 2018 until July 2020, all smARTplaces partners hosted – in triennial frequency – one of eight live dialogue sessions, consisting of a Q&A simulcast on Facebook Live, where the public were able to virtually attend and participate in connecting, interacting and discovering art professions and all that happens behind the scenes of museums and cultural institutions. This project was conceived to experiment with how digital tools can be used for transnational storytelling. In this instance, we interpreted storytelling as sharing of process by people and teams who are normally not visible to members of the public - including curators, artists, editors and technical teams. We have observed that although live-streaming is a very useful format to engage different audiences that are not able to participate physically, this format requires the same logistical effort on offering high quality content as any other offline-format to enable and facilitate active audience participation during the live-dialogue. Overall, #TheWorkofArt live streams reached more than 25,000 people via social media.

#TheWorkofArt ©Azkuna Zentroa

Innovative Citizen - Co-creation, Participation and Maker Culture from Germany to Spain

'Innovative Citizen – festival for a more democratic technology' was a festival of workshops and participatory activities that celebrated maker culture practices and sustainability. It has been held since 2014 at the Dortmunder U and is an effective example of how existing work can be iterated on and its value extended across a partnership. For the smARTplaces project it was extended by a second edition hosted by Etopia Center for Art and Technology in Zaragoza, Spain. The event explored the possibility of establishing a meeting point between the maker communities of both cities in the pursuit of knowledge exchange. Etopia adapted the spirit of the festival and put the emphasis on the idea of local sustainability, so that the festival would allow connection with new agents in the city. Workshops drew playfully on old and new technologies, incorporating digital sensors, 3-D printers, electronics kits and bio labs but with a focus on DIY, the circular economy and sustainability issues. From this project we learned that knowledge transfer between partners can be very valuable, but cultural activity must nonetheless feel appropriate for the needs of local audiences too.

Media Facade Academy - Digital Art Training

The Media Facade Academy, run by Etopia and Azkuna Zentroa, was an intensive training program designed for artists, professionals and students from Spain interested in the skills, abilities and the framework needed to operate Etopia's Media Facade, as well as creating and developing works visible in an impressive artistic digital media display. As part of smARTplaces, the two active partners co-ordinated in a yearly edition. Each institution presented the possibilities of using the public digital screens as media art broadcasting platforms through different activities. This gave the participating artists the opportunity to experiment and explore the potential of using the facade, as well as receiving training and mentorship to develop their personal projects with a possibility

to be broadcasted on different media walls and facades. For Etopia, it was important that the participating artists could continue to develop content for this new medium which they came into contact with through the training programme in Zaragoza. The programme also provided Azkuna Zentroa the opportunity to offer original content on their Sun screen, supporting works by emerging artists. This collaboration has proved to be very effective as it has managed to expand the geographical area from which the participants come, thanks to the amplification that Azkuna Zentroa gives to the call. It also created opportunities for visibility for local artists thanks to the dissemination of their work in the Basque Country.

Media Facade Academy, Etopia ©Julian Fallas

The Art of Skate - Co-Curation with Local Communities

Art of Skate opening at Dortmunder U ©Roland Baege

Art of Skate ©Roland Baege

Skateboarders often use public spaces around cultural institutions like the Dortmunder U to skate. But how do skaters redefine urbanity for their purposes and how do they perceive the city? While it is widely accepted for artists to re-think urban environments, a re-definition made by other groups such as skaters is not seen as a creative or artistic process. So how can cultural institutions collaborate with specific communities and develop them as participants and audiences, by redefining the outside and inside of spaces to tell a new story about both? How can they connect with an unknown audience and invite them to participate in the cultural program with an exhibition? These were the initial questions the Dortmunder U and Azkuna Zentroa in Bilbao asked as a starting point to collaborate with their local skateboard communities. This collaboration was a step towards learning the rules of engagement in terms of giving way to different cultural

concepts and internalising those and resulted in: cross-cultural exchange visits; new social media presence; a co-created exhibition in spring 2019, including digitally-enabled showcases like a 360°-skate-tour through the city for non-skaters to explore the skaters perception of the urban spaces around them. It enabled the cultural institutions to practice change of perspectives between the organisation, current audiences, and newly developed participatory audiences (skaters) in order to start a long-term relationship with this specific community which has many outcomes. This activity demonstrated a valuable lesson in the potential for interpreting communities and subcultures of a city as visible and engageable participants and audiences.

Small Cabinets of Curiosity & Collectie in vitro - New forms of mediation

Originated by Musée de Picardie and working with the Liechtenstein National Museum, the small cabinets of curiosity were devices designed to host collections in places that usually can't display artifacts from museums. They stressed exchanges between publics, institutions and countries and targeted young people as a priority. Each institution curated a cabinet for another, enlisting visitors. The small cabinets of curiosity were designed to tour across the partner network. Visitors curate the cabinet - the next place curates it anew. The goal was to reach out to communities that weren't currently engaged with the museum as a concept or space. This included groups who might be curious about a partner offering, but weren't able to visit due to a variety of accessibility reasons. The cabinet was also an opportunity to make a radical departure from current models of public engagement posing questions for curators: What happens when we set new rules of engagement? Does this break down barriers? Does it encourage curiosity or even a sense of playfulness?

In April 2018 the VanAbbemuseum opened the first Collectie in vitro vitrine at the Van der Valk hotel, a 4 star well-known hotel in Eindhoven as a noteworthy mediation tool in engaging publics with art beyond the museum walls. Piet Hein Eek, a famous Dutch designer, designed and produced the Vitrine and made the first selection of art from the Van Abbemuseum collection. Mediation was done by means of a video playing on a screen accompanying the installation as well as in the digital communication of Van Abbemuseum, with an interview with Piet Hein Eek explaining his choice of works on display. During the course of the project, the different guest curators shared very personal stories in the video interviews that were very much appreciated by the people visiting the hotel lobby.

This offered a new way of connecting to artworks and the themes they engage with, for audiences that didn't come to the museum. Since the guest curators are all famous local people, it also helped in connecting with a different local audience. For example an international dance producer, an Olympic swimmer, as well as a successful comedian all showed their selection of artworks together with their personal interpretation of these works. The project is such a success that at the end of 2020, another Vitrine project opens at Eindhoven Airport.

Small Cabinets of Curiosity ©G Gillmann

# Strategic Storytelling & Change Management Programme

Performance of Dance and New Media Lab, Etopia

Another central objective of the project was to establish a more audience-centered communication and storytelling approach within the institutions by offering new narrative experiences. Museums are in a unique position to create social impact, but in order to do so, it is imperative to build digital capacity. Consequently, the project emphasised conducting long-term experiments on digital identity building, digital storytelling and change management. This was implemented around existing formats over a period of three years with the support of external experts. Central to project development and identity has been the contribution and methodology of Dr Abhay Adhikari and his *Digital Identities Programme* (dhyaandesign.com) in aiding change management, coordination and alignment of concepts and mission across elements of project engagement.

The first part of the programme involved running a series of short, focussed experiments over a span of 18 months to create good practice. The second part consisted of a year long change management programme focused on introducing new ways of working and cross-departmental collaboration to each organisation. From learning how to collaborate internally to co-creating playful experiences with members of the public, the partners conducted local experiment on cultural mediation, digitally-enabled practices and behaviour change. The support equipped the members to test and scale the new approach to audience engagement and co-creation and contribute to internal culture change and capacity building, acknowledging the good practice and strengths of their institutions and encouraging a more reflective way of working.

smARTplaces app
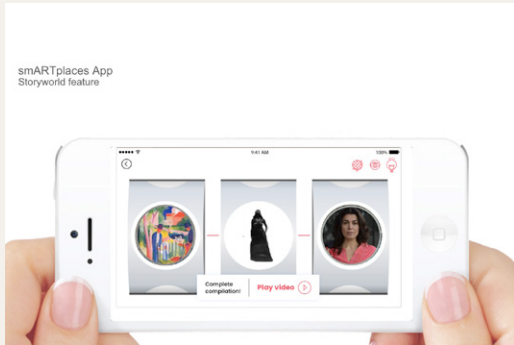
smARTplaces app storyworld

smARTplaces app AR tour feature ©Roland Baege

Expanding the cultural experiences beyond the physical visit through the use of digital infrastructure, tools, services and offers was one of the central aims of the smARTplaces project. Different sub-projects explored the possibilities in expanding the user experience into the digital world and allowed different audience groups to consume services, explore stories and perceive the museums and cultural offers from different perspectives and narratives. During the project several digital tools as well as social media platforms and content strategies were being tested for the use in culture in regards to effectiveness, acceptance and feasibility in operation. The smARTplaces app was produced by menschortweb and the University of Applied Sciences Oulu (OAMK) together with the smARTplaces partners and was released in spring 2019 for iOS and Android. The mobile application is an iteration from the 'experience_zkm' app, produced by ZKM as an extension of the museum space, providing information about the exhibitions in the building through audio guides and augmented reality experiences.

Gamification elements also served to address other target groups and interest them in the ZKM. The smARTplaces app builds on this and includes an augmented reality compass, an augmented reality art hunt through the different cities as well as an innovative storyworld feature in which users can playfully discover non-linear stories from the participating cultural institutions across Europe. Further development added new features including: virtual and augmented-reality based tours through the museums, automatic image recognition, location based services and indoor positioning. The tour feature was put to test with map-based collection tours at the Liechtenstein National Museum and augmented-reality based tours for the Museum Ostwall at the Dortmunder U during the temporary closure of the museum as well as for our final smARTplaces conference in 2020 where audiences were able to explore all partnering institutions of the project and video-based examples of their activities from the work programme.

Art of Skate was the first ever exhibition that was co-created together with a local community (skaters) and artists right from the start, so at the beginning it was unclear if it can be successfully implemented at all. The final product, the exhibition and creative exchange with Azkuna Zentroa however exceeded all expectations. It reached very high visitor numbers and also attracted an audience group that would usually not be regular visitors. Positive feedback from politics, policy makers, audiences, and the local skater community showed that co-created exhibitions are of high relevance and can increase the positive impact of a cultural institution among local communities and even further."

—— Britta Lerch, Dortmunder U

One of the main objectives for Azkuna Zentroa was to work in collaboration with European partners and jointly define projects to improve audience participation. We decided to take advantage of any collaboration to get to know the partners well and try to collaborate and participate actively. Thanks to smARTplaces we now have a strong relationship with our partners. The joint activities made us part of a european network and gave us a european identity.

—— Bárbara Epalza, Azkuna Zentroa

Over 20 people were involved in the organization of our #TheWorkofArt edition featuring Pink Floyd designer Aubrey Powell and it exceeded our expectations. There were so many questions asked – via social media as well as from the audience in the auditorium – that we had to extend it from 45 minutes up to 1,5 hours. Make sure everyone – including the technical staff – knows what to do and why. It' hard to work with a team that doesn't know what the objective is. Don't think it's easy to organize it just because it's online – it's a real event, which needs time to prepare.

Jenni Müller, Dortmunder U

Directly inspired by the success of the Small Cabinets of Curiosity, our director decided to create a permanent version for the museum. We will develop mediation tools in the future to interact more with the visitors and invite some of them to curate it in some ways. It actually made the museum more visible during a period of closure. It also made us more visible in the wider professional field as we participated in publications and conferences to share our experiences with it.

Aurélie Maguet, Musée De Picardie

Storytelling as an infinitely expandable mix of formats, CAMPING and The Art of Skate are models for rewriting scripts from cultural institutions about the approaches of cultural education, for connecting subject and object more closely in a playful and serious way, and for engaging in more open dialogues and joint 'products' with communities and users. To plan and implement public events in this way requires a critical self-image, a different way of working, which demands time and great attention and moderation skills. Digitality refers to new relationships, asks about roles and tasks, control, hierarchies and foreign knowledge that is not available in a 'leading' person. It also demands technical know-how, which, however, remains meaningless without its own content. Apparently, more and more questions remain open than answered. This must remain bearable - as a core competence.

Mechthild Eickhoff, Fonds Soziokultur,
formerly Dortmunder U UZWEI

Critical questions

The smARTplaces project was designed explicitly to address a number of Creative Europe policy areas. Our contributions have focused on issues of audience development, capacity building in digitisation, as well as training and education. The project has generated insights into the nature of cultural collaboration between institutions across the EU in terms of organisational and operational challenges. As we have discovered, local factors within institutions and their contexts need to be carefully taken account of should they impede the need to be swift and responsive in the light of digital opportunities.

The nature of the project has enabled cross departmental exchange within institutions and across the partnership as a variety of collaborative skills were brought to the table and skills and ideas exchanged, e.g. across marketing, education, and creative work. Both offline and online, the project has offered a 'public sphere' that emphasised its creatively democratic approach to the exchange of ideas and skills. Below we set out the key critical questions that have emerged from our project evaluation that we feel others – whether in cultural policy roles or from within cultural institutions – may find valuable. We hope you will consider these as you make your own contributions to developing future *smART* audiences and places.

1st smARTplaces Conference ZKM ©Felix Gruenschloss

1 Keeping up with the pace of change in the digital world can be costly and perhaps even distracting for cultural organisations. What is the right balance between embracing trends in digital innovation and valuing established modes of communication and participation?

2 An easy presumption to make about digital technologies is that they tend to be global in nature and thus patterns of usage must surely be similar. What can we learn from local, or even hyperlocal, perspectives on the digital?

3 What is the appropriate critical approach to the issues presented by digital change? Does a turn to the affordances of the digital in order to know and reach audiences present potential risks such as challenges in data management and safeguarding privacy?

4 How are audiences imagined by the cultural policy objectives that inform project work? Whether conceptualising them as citizens or consumer 'types', it suggests an impoverishment. Perhaps there's a way to move beyond this towards a more critical concept of 'smartness'.

5 There has been something of a digital turn in cultural policy. The 'smart' agenda for cities and culture speaks to those institutions seeking to innovate and to find new ways of connecting with audiences via digital mechanisms. But what are the evaluation tools that we can use to understand 'smart' participation?

6 Whilst quantitative measures are often central to understanding the success of projects, we also need to hear qualitative narratives to understand the role that local cultural contexts play in shaping the success of failure of initiatives. How can we ensure that we don't lose the 'voice' of partners in our evaluation design?

7 How can we collectively challenge audience perceptions of cultural institutions? Should we be thinking beyond seeing this as a local issue and instead recognise this as part of a broader sectoral need to create spaces that audiences feel 'comfortable' (or perhaps 'uncomfortable') in?

8 Effective collaboration has been at the centre of smARTplaces' ethos. What is the right balance between ensuring collaborative briefs are open enough for local interpretation, yet give sufficient direction to enable them to speak to collective concerns?

9 U R ART was developed as a 'safe space' to experiment with ways to increase the visibility of cultural institutions to new audiences. What organisational and cultural challenges might be faced when planning projects like this and how can persuade funders of the value of failing?

10 Enabling smARTplaces to become a knowledge sharing space for discussing local ideas in a broader European context has been a key outcome for our project. How will you place knowledge exchange at the heart of your activity to ensure that cultural institutions can learn from each other and remain resilient in challenging times?

smARTplaces – A European Audience Development Project 2016-2020