



IN SITU

THE EUROPEAN PLATFORM FOR ARTISTIC CREATION IN PUBLIC SPACE

SUBMISSION CULTURAL RIGHTS AND PUBLIC SPACES

Answers to the questionnaire on cultural rights and public spaces of the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner

13th May 2019

IN SITU is the European platform for artistic creation in public space, gathering 28 members and associate members from 19 countries. Since 2003, it has supported more than 200 artists working outside conventional venues and contributing to the transformation of our territories. IN SITU is an ecosystem connecting a new generation of artists with audiences, programmers, and key-players involved in the economic, political and social realities around Europe and internationally.

IN SITU develops an ecology of creation based on transnational artistic workshops and laboratories, European and international residencies and collective mentoring for pilot artistic projects. IN SITU also designs tailored consulting and expertise for European cities, online training modules (MOOC) and a Think Tank dedicated to artistic creation in public space.

The goal of developing IN SITU into this ecosystem is becoming more and more of a reality every day. Despite ever-increasing constraints, whether financial, security or political, which are further exacerbated by the shrinking of public space, the 20 network partners continue to work passionately with audiences, convinced that the irreverent perspective of emerging artists creating in public space can provide a unique take on the reality and challenges of our contemporary European societies.

For all these reasons it seemed appropriate to answer, as a network, to the questionnaire of the United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Ms. Karima Bennoune.

What are the various existing definitions of “public spaces” used in national legislation or proposed by international mechanisms, experts and civil society organizations? Are other terms used such as “civic space” and “public domain”? What is the scope of the concept of such public spaces?

Amongst the countries represented by the network, the notion of “public space” can take various declensions, and sometimes the expression “public realm” is also used: from a square to a street, a park, a public office, a shopping centre, a museum, a natural landscape... Whether members come from a sprawling metropolis or a rural area, whether they are seeking to rehabilitate industrial wasteland or redesign landscapes, the goal is always to serve artists working with, in and for public space.

As a network supporting these artists, we understand “public space” as all unconventional venues where it seems relevant to present the artistic projects. Often the creations are tailor-made for a specific space and the organisers are constantly collaborating with the artists to find the right space to highlight: a hemicycle for a project about democracy, an unused boutique to create a fake shop, a forest for a wandering across the sounds of the trees, etc.

Public space issues are European questions. Cities in Europe were built using the same model and now share the same challenges: regeneration, gentrification, migrations and self-segregation, competition and attractiveness, relationships between city centres and suburban areas, etc. Rural areas are also affected by the same changes: urban sprawl, land division, and the need to properly manage development and tourism. The digital revolution has reinvented the definition of physical public space to include virtual public space. Community gardens, connected urban furniture, temporary installations dedicated to conviviality, social media communities, and digital content sharing platforms are flourishing and helping shape «creative cities».

This is all happening at a time when economic uncertainty, public funding cutbacks and radical behavioural changes instigated by the digital revolution are on their way to completely reshaping existing artistic, social and economic models.

This is also happening at a time when privatisation of public space is becoming more and more significant as we can observe everywhere in Europe a shrinking of public space.

Artistic creation in public space has an important role to play in meeting these challenges while acting together to build a renewed unity where artists and cultural operators are the mediators of a dialogue to push the boundaries of public space.

What are the diverse legal frameworks, trends and practices at the national level that either promote or impede actors from across the cultural ecosystem, including women and persons with disabilities, from accessing and using public spaces? What strategies are most useful in overcoming such challenges?

Although the current challenges mentioned in the previous question are widely shared across European countries, we noticed that the situation can be very different from one city to the other, from one place to the other.

The main challenge cultural operators and artists have to face today when it comes to presenting artworks in public space is the increase of security restrictions related to the gathering of people in public space. Following the terrorist attacks that stroke Europe these last years, many rules have understandably been implemented to reinforce the security of citizens in public space. The drawback of these new rules is that it has become more and more difficult to organise events gathering audiences in public space. As an example, when the project *A piece of 2*, from the Dutch artist [Nick Steur](#), has been presented in a square in Marseille (France), the organiser has been told to close the space in order to secure the area and check the bags of the audience before entering the space. This performance was yet a project made for contemplation, inviting the audience to pass-by or to stay for hours, and the presence of fences around it undermined the artist’s statements.

This issue is tackled very differently from one city to the other, and what one can observe is that the output of this process depends a lot on the quality of the relationship between the organiser and the local authorities. Some get perfectly on board and collaborate with the artists and the organisers to make the best of the situation, proposing high quality artworks while keeping the audiences safe at the same time. Other local authorities are more reluctant to cooperate, asking the organisers to directly take in charge part of the security measures, at their own cost, thus decreasing inevitably the budget dedicated to the artists (taking into account that most of these events are free, without ticketing).

The way this security question is tackled by the states but more importantly by local authorities is thus a key aspect when it comes to preserving both the artistic integrity of the projects and the budget devoted to artistic projects.

[What are the specific characteristics of public spaces that either are conducive to the realization of cultural rights, including of women and persons with disabilities, or are an impediment to them, including in relation to issues of discrimination, equal access, accessibility, availability, and adequacy?](#)

In the network, there are several ways to tackle the question of equal access and representativeness in public space.

The first one is to start from the place. Each city, each neighbourhood, each village, each context has its own issues, when it comes to social cohesion, relationships between communities or architectural past. The members of the network have a good understanding of the contexts they are working in, and when they identify a specific field they would like to tackle, they commission artists to intervene. As part of the Think Tank on artistic creation in public space launched by IN SITU, several artists have been invited between 2018 and 2019 to operate artistic acupuncture in diverse places in Europe. The Greek artist [Maria Sideri](#) was one of them, invited in Marseille to react artistically around the sensitive question of the vision and use young girls and women have of public space in this city. After one week of meetings and encounters, the artist produced an artistic proposition to react to the situation, in this case workshops with women to build their own maps of the city that will be put on lighted billboards in public spaces to lighten the dark areas. More than answers to complex questions, these artistic proposals are to be considered as the visionary power of artists when they look at the challenges of our contemporary societies.

The second way is to start with the artists. Some artists have made it their trademark to work on these subjects, to work for and with specific audiences, some other do it just for one project. Many of them choose to do so to give a voice to the people unheard, to give them visibility in public space. The delicate project *We Meet in Paradise* from the German/French company [Theatre Fragile](#) is a good example of how migrants are participating to a performance in public space while speaking about themselves at the same time. With their project *Shoe Shining*, the Kosovar collective [Haveit](#) embodies a direct activist approach while making the audience think about the male domination in public space.

The third way is to work on the accessibility of the performances in public space for the audience. To decide to work only in public space is already a statement per se: we reach out to the people directly where they live, work, are. There is no need for the people to make an effort to go to a cultural space and most of the time passers-by also become audiences, be it for a minute or for the entire performance. Which make it accessible to everyone. Most of the members are furthermore making more and more efforts to facilitate the accessibility of their events, improving technical solutions as well as developing strong local partnerships and long-term relationship with their audience.

What could be the contents and contours of a possible “right to public spaces”, and of legitimate restrictions that could be made to it, in accordance with international standards? Is this concept employed in your country or in your work? Is it helpful?

IN SITU fully endorses the introduction of a “right to public space” as it goes in line with what we stand up for: an equal access to public space for all citizens. Even the motto of IN SITU refers to that notion at a time where public space is shrinking: “Reclaim public space!”, as public space should be for all, should be owned by all.

This is also why IN SITU supports participatory projects, where artists are creating with citizens. These co-creation projects, often then visible in public space, are means to make the inhabitants conscious about new and original ways to use public space and to re-appropriate their own living environment. With *The Fleeting City*, the French artist [Olivier Grossetête](#) is building collective monumental free-standing cardboard constructions in relation to the existing architecture. The construction preparation workshops help to federate the teams which consist of amateurs, inhabitants of the city. The project seeks to break down traditional power symbols in the city, establish new codes and bring people together in an open and utopic project where they can dream up a new city. In a simple way, the project helps to repair the social relationships that are crumbling in major cities. It’s a way of sharing time together.

Having a “right to public spaces” for the artistic creation could thus be a guarantee that these kinds of events get the right consideration from the authorities, as we can observe that sometimes it is less complicated to ask authorisations for commercial events than for artistic projects. It could also be a way to secure the access to public space in countries where the very notion of public space is challenged by the government, as a consequence of populist policies.

What is the role of cultural rights in ensuring the existence, availability, accessibility, and adequacy of public spaces that are conducive to widespread participation in cultural life, the realization of citizenship, cultural democracy, as well as the realization of other human rights?

The starting point of the activities of the network is public space and we think this is how we contribute to widespread participation in cultural life: we think it is the best way to touch everybody, to bring art to everyone, where they live. The idea is, rather than targeting specific audiences, to target specific places. As an insight, it would seem to us more relevant and including to work with a specific neighbourhood where several generations of migrants (new ones and former ones) live, rather than say that we want to target only the newcomers, excluding the rest of the inhabitants.

Accessibility also goes along with a policy regarding ticketing. Most of the performances in public space are free, which means that the price is not impeding people from enjoying them. This free access also includes passers-by, which means that by putting artworks directly in public space, we are touching audiences that wouldn’t even have thought going to a cultural event. And when ticketed, a low-price policy is still often set up, so that the performances stay accessible.

Artists working in public space are directly in line with the challenges of our societies, making public space, this space supposedly be shared by all, the centre of their concerns. Many artistic projects are speaking about accessibility, living together, participation, citizenship, and democracy. As a network, IN SITU is in a way just the reflection of their questionings, helping them bringing their views on the contemporary challenges to the audience. One of the pilot projects of IN SITU for the period 2016-2020, *In Search of Democracy 3.0*, by Dutch artist [Lucas de Man](#), is precisely dealing with these issues: the artist worked together with local partners to make an investigation of current democracy and its challenges for the future. With a traveling visual and musical performance, he shows how a young generation shapes tomorrow’s democracies. This ongoing research will inform not only the theatre performance but also a documentary series and online knowledge platform. And it involves the audience during the performance in such a way that they actively participate and directly experiment democracy tools.

What is the impact on the enjoyment of cultural rights of trends regarding privatization, which may affect a variety of public spaces?

By bringing artists and audience together in public space, all the work IN SITU is doing contributes to the re-appropriation of public space. In a way, it helps slowing the process of segmentation of public spaces by occupying temporarily spaces that are not initially dedicated to art, spaces of the day-to-day life, spaces forgotten, spaces unseen. It thus invites the audience and the citizens to take another look at their environment.

The work made by the members locally to help the artists implement their projects is deeply rooted in the partnerships made with local authorities, inhabitants and even with the private sector, to use unconventional spaces for artistic projects, such as a city council, a park or a shopping centre. Depending on the country, sometimes even the use of a road can require to establish various partnerships, as the pavement belongs to the city, but the walls may belong to an investment fund, the street lighting and the fountains might be administered by private companies... all interlocutors the organiser would have to deal with if he/she wants to present a show where the audience is moving across the street, where the fountain is supposed to stop at some point for the purpose of the performance, and where specific lighting effects are to be hung on walls.

The work of IN SITU also fosters to bring to light the issue of privatisation by showing to the audience where public space ends and where private space starts. The project *Dominoes*, by the British company [Station House Opera](#), is a good example in that matters, which was presented in many cities across Europe. A thousands of breezeblocks create a moving sculpture running across the city like a line of dominoes. In Copenhagen, 7,000 blocks drew a 3 km route through the city. Traffic was stopped, and people got together in the streets. 200 volunteers built the installation, and 25,000 more protected the fragile line and finally watched, ran and experienced the slowly falling cascade of blocks through both well-known and hidden parts of the city, through public space as well as private houses, stopping here and continuing there, according to where it was possible to pass and where it was necessary to bypass.

What recommendations should be made to States and other stakeholders concerning these topics?

IN SITU would have three recommendations.

The first one would be to help artists and organisers of festivals and events in their relationship with the authorities and particularly with local authorities, when it comes to organising events in public space. In that sense, the notion of “right to public space” could be really helpful, making it mandatory for the local authorities to facilitate the implementation of artistic projects in public space.

The second recommendation, linked to the first one, would be to avoid making artists and organisers bear all the responsibility regarding the security of audience. First and foremost, the moral responsibility should not be only taken by the organisers but should be shared with the authorities. And the second step would be that the organisers should be relieved of the financial burden by additional specific public support (local or national) dedicated to security measures. This form of support could be also specific training when it comes to security of audience (both for the authorities and the organisers for instance).

The third recommendation would be to include artists and cultural operators as key players of the future of our public spaces: they must have a say about how new spaces are built, how old spaces are transformed, about social justice, cultural identity and urban regeneration. Cultural actors should be part of the discussions in the process of reclaiming public space together with urban planners, policy makers, investors, architects etc..

OUR FLAGSHIP PROJECTS

Pilot projects

A new way of supporting artists



6 artistic projects have been collectively selected by the partners for what they tell about Europe, to be supported from inception to touring: *Twenty-eight* by Richard Wiesner (CZ), *Studio Cité* by Benjamin Vandewalle (BE), *Foreign Tongues* by Liquid loft (AT), *In search of Democracy 3.0* by Lucas De Man (BE/NL), *A certain value* by Anna Rispoli (IT) and *PIG*, by Kaleider (UK). These projects will be supported whilst going beyond the notion of coproduction or mobility and exploring co-development between artists and IN SITU partners.

Think Tank

Thinking actively for public space



Starting from the principle that the creative power of artists can initiate transformations in our societies, the Think Tank will invest the social and political field. Nine “artistic acupuncture” will take place in Europe between Autumn 2018 and end of 2019. With a traveller’s eye, a fresh and perhaps slightly irreverent look, the artists will come up with proposals to local issues related to social justice, cultural identity or urban regeneration. A big conference will be held in Brussels in April 2020 to present the outputs.

Artistic encounters

For each step of the creation



Alongside the pilot projects, IN SITU supports many other emerging artists with original meeting formats. These artistic moments out of time are seen as a chance to glimpse new ways of interacting with the audience and adapt a show to a location or context. Each of these encounters fits with a specific stage of the artistic endeavour. From the ideation phase (Hot House), through design phase (Residencies) all the way to production (Ateliers), artists are invited to share their ideas with other artists and organisers from across Europe.

Capacity building

A MOOC for art in public space



In September 2019, IN SITU will release the first MOOC on art in public space. A MOOC is a digital learning tool, using videos and innovative techniques, forums and tools to monitor knowledge acquisition via self- or peer-assessment. Illustrated with artistic projects coming from all over Europe, the MOOC “Create in public space” will specifically make the participants question in what conditions public space can become a place of artistic expression and explore the ways a location influences the work and the work transforms the space.

Transnational mobility

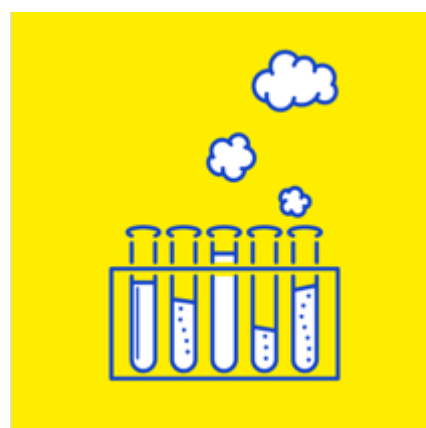
Bringing artworks to audience



By nature, artistic projects in public space are reaching a very wide range of audience: festival goers, participative volunteers, passersby... Art in public space is open and free to all, accessible and catching the attention of inhabitants in their daily life. The artists identified during all IN SITU programmes are touring in Europe. A budget is allocated for the mobility of these artists to the partners organisations during major festivals open to tens of thousands of spectators or more territorial-focused events attracting thousands of participants.

Tailored consulting and experts

For European cities



A consulting programme is launched to create visibility for the network, find solutions to real needs, and generate economic opportunities for artists who work in public space. Members of the network consider this important as they are increasingly asked to share their experience with political decision-makers and cultural institutions in European cities, including European capitals of Culture. With the aim of structuring the sector on a transnational level, a joint consulting programme is a step forward for the network.



www.in-situ.info

[Link to the video presentation](#)

[Link to the 2019 publication: IN SITU Artists bear witness to European challenges](#)

IN SITU is led by Lieux publics - European and national center for artistic creation in public space (France), and brings together 20 partners from 12 countries: Artopolis Association / PLACCC Festival (Hungary), Atelier 231 / Festival Viva Cité (France), CIFAS (Belgium), Ctyri dny / 4+4 Days in Motion (Czech Republic), FAI-AR (France), Freedom Festival (United Kingdom), Kimmel Center (The United States of America), Metropolis (Denmark), La Paperie (France), La Strada (Austria), Les Tombées de la Nuit (France), Lieux publics (France), Norfolk & Norwich Festival (United Kingdom), Teatri ODA (Kosovo), Theater op de Markt (Belgium), On the Move (Belgium), Østfold kulturutvikling (Norway), Oerol Festival (The Netherlands), Terni Festival (Italy), UZ Arts (United Kingdom).



Since 2018, IN SITU gathers new associated members. So far, Bildstörung Europäisches Straßentheaterfestival Detmold (Germany), Biela Noc (Slovakia) Eleusis 2021 European Capital of Culture (Greece) and FiraTàrrega (Spain), Bússola (Portugal), ANTI Festival (Finland), Matera 2019 European Capital of Culture (Italy) and Sura Medura (Sri Lanka). More to come soon.



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