
Methods #2: Processing reality

In our daily life we are influenced by the information we receive from our immediate surroundings. Our interaction with society and our way of thinking is impacted by our previous experiences and knowledge, our cultural context, behavioral patterns, social norms, advertisement and many other factors. We sort the incoming information and identify with some topics and ignore the rest. Together this information shapes the fabric we describe as our reality. Due to the contextual characteristics of creative activism, we find it important to connect the issues present in the reality of the actors with the issues present in the community in which they live. We focus on the political and social context and the communication channels in our surroundings.



Visuals by:
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2.1 Contextualizing creative activism

Creative activism as such need a social context to make sense, without connections with the society it will appear empty. An action taken out of its context, placed in a different society, will not necessarily have the same effect or even serve a similar purpose as the original. Though there are shareable tactics and tools which are vividly used and applied in many communities around the globe, it is a consideration to develop an understanding of the context in which you operate. By reflecting over the context and plan actions using an bottom-up process, you can avoid making actions that seem out of place, become misunderstood, or considered to be pointless.

Understanding the contextual nature of creative activism

Time:

1 hour

Target group:

Experienced

Group size:

10-20

Material:

Beamer, computer, internet. Optional: paper and marker for taking notes.

Make sure you and the participant arrange the room in a non-formal setting, maybe they prefer to sit on pillows on the floor instead of chairs, in a circle e.t.c. Explain the sequence of activities this exercise will include.

Visioning

"When was the first moment you remember yourself getting political?" Let the people close their eyes and ask them to remember, their first memory of when they acted with a political behavior. Take time for the people to go through their memories. If it feels appropriate, you can ask additional questions like, *how did*

it feel? what was the reaction of the people around you? what exactly motivated you to do the act? Keep track of time the time, approximately 7-10 min should be enough.

Sharing

After the visioning is completed, invite the participants to share their experiences in a circle. Let people skip the sharing, if someone feels it is too personal. Stimulate the sharing by additional questions which help analyzing the experiences. Ask, if any of the participants have similar experiences. Do not forget to keep a bit track of time.

Providing material for discussion

Then it can be nice with some additional input about creative activism. In some of our sessions we used a fragment from a lecture done by Stephen Duncombe. The objective of this step is to provide material for a discussion. In order to save time and keep the activity focused, I choose to show only 18 minutes of the material. Ask the participants to watch the video analytically, if necessary (in a group of beginners), prepare specific questions to reflect upon.

Reflecting

Depending from the size of the group, the reflection can be done by all participants together (up to 12 people), or in smaller groups (answering the same questions simultaneously, or doing it in the "global cafe" format). Encourage to share - 1) what in the video they already knew about, 2) something new they found, 3) what they would disagree with - why? 4) what role in the disagreement plays the contextually (the American author): would it work in European context? what makes it different?

If you plan to use the results of the reflection round, document the key points in a visual way.

Tip:

Even though visioning as a method seems a bit like esoteric (to sit in a circle, closing your eyes), it actually opens a new level in the group dynamic - the level of trust in the group rises, people share very personal things, the group is becoming more homogeneous. This exercise requires a sensitivity from the

facilitator to spot, when the participants are following the process and when they are lost and need encouraging questions.

2.2. Defining our social context and our interaction within it

Understanding the personal context and coming to realize how the social climate is shaped by thousands of personal contexts, is one step in defining your possibilities to modify and improve your environment. We as social beings who constantly transmit information. To connect personal and public, through reflection on personal experiences we can achieve an understanding of the complicated structure of the community.

The following methods we found especially suitable for mixed groups, where there is no previously specified shared context or obvious topics of interest. Newly formed working groups who are based around a common topic, but need to investigate about their target audience also can find it useful.

Mapping exercise

Time:

30 mins

Target group:

Beginner

Group size:

Any

Material:

Two different colors of post its, large papers and pencils.

A visual method to develop a vision in together in a group of the current situation and how society react and act.



Draw three concentric circles, like 3 layers on the big paper sheet. Name all the circles, the inner circle will be the the reality, the second circle is about how this reality affects us, and the third one how we react or act.

Give 15 min to the group to reflect about each part of the scheme, starting for the inner circle. First the participants reflect about our reality, the next step is to reflect about how it affects us, and the last to think about how we react to this. Ask the people to write down their ideas about each layer on a post it note and paste the notes in the circles.

Participants can choose two different colors of post its depending on if what they write about is negative or positive. The people have a moment to think and write whatever it is that come to their minds. Invite to share everything from opinions, ideas, stories, slogans to poems, all related with the topic of the circle using the positive/negative colors. As the post its start to appear on the wall, we are quietly building the collective mental map.

To finish the exercise, the group review the collective map together, analyzing the ideas in the post its, taking a look at the positive and negative colors. Now you have an overview of the groups vision of the situation and how the society

react and act.



Visuals by:
Recolectivo

Simulation game - identifying topics

Time:
2 hours

Target group:

Any

Group size:

Any

Material:

Small papers and pens for notes, large paper or a blackboard. Writing equipment to visualise the outcome.

Searching for topics in the group

Ask everyone to personally think of the top three issues/topics which they would be motivated to work on improving. Ask to divide in couples and compare your lists. Try to identify similar topics and invent macro topics. If the group is larger than 10 people, get together in groups of two couples and repeat the process.

Visualization of the results

Visualize the topics on a wall, preferably structured according to the macro topics. Let the participants do that (by post-its, writing notes or any other way), make sure interactive clustering is happening while visualizing (ask the group, what do they think, which topics suit together).

Check out what the macro topics of main concern are in the group. If the group is big, ask people to choose the macro topic they are most interested in and form working groups. For this a simple voting technique can be used - everyone has two dots they can put on the issues they are the most motivated about/engaged with.

Reflection

Share your motivation to work with the issues - ask, why the people would like to work with the concrete issues. Depending from the size of the group, it can be done together, or in smaller groups.

Ask the group/s to share knowledge about initiatives, actions and individuals already working on the concrete issues. Depending from the group and time, it can be done all together, in smaller groups or by using the principle of "global cafe". Add the results sharing to the visual map (let participants do that).

Share in the big group/smaller groups/couples, which of the ideas/actions they find inspiring and what could be repeated.

Tip:

The process of finding macro-topics requires mastering the time management, otherwise its easy to get lost in discussions. As well, depending from the group dynamics and settings, sometimes its nicer to swap groups for different parts of this exercise, but in other cases - it might be too confusing (mainly, if this exercise is just a part of bigger session).
