

European *Alternatives* Journal

Democracy,
Equality & Culture
Beyond
the Nation State

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European Alternatives

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Imagine, Demand, Enact

Printed in Italy, 2024

Jana Ahlers is the Train Stream lead at European Alternatives and the Head of Education and Learning.

She cares about pedagogy, movement strategy, counter-hegemonic knowledge production and building agile, unlikely and resilient alliances. She is a facilitator, social and climate justice organizer and activist with experience across Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, the UK, and Germany, dedicated to building solidarity across struggles and borders.

Irene Alonso Toucido is the project manager of the Democratic Odyssey, a collaborative and decentralised initiative aiming at institutionalizing a peoples' assembly and participatory ecosystem in Europe.

As a sociologist, Irene has a profound professional and personal interest in the commons, citizen participation and ecofeminism. She is particularly fascinated by the connections between degrowth, community and ancestral wisdoms. Of nomadic nature, Irene's work is driven by a commitment to fostering inclusive and sustainable societies. She has contributed to numerous projects and international forums, advocating for policies that empower communities. Her diverse experience and interdisciplinary approach enable her to connect theoretical concepts with practical applications, making her a bridge for grounding the Democratic Odyssey project.

Myriam Bahaffou is a PhD candidate in philosophy and gender/feminist studies (Université Picardie Jules Verne, CURAPP & University of Ottawa, IEF), an ecofeminist activist, a joyful antispeciesist and an outspoken eropolitician.

Her work takes an intersectional approach to antispeciesism, focusing on the dynamics of animalisation and humanisation of minorities, particularly racial minorities. She has been working on various aspects of ecofeminism, such as land, food justice, sexuality, and religion/spirituality, always from a micropolitical perspective. She advocates for an emotional understanding of politics, focusing on relationships and desire, which will be the main topic of her next book, announced for March 2025. Her previous one, "Des paillettes sur le compost, écoféminismes au quotidien" was published by Le passager clandestin in 2022.

Stephanie Bonnici's work resides at the intersection of dialogue, policy, the arts, and communities.

Drawing on her background of bringing communities together and facilitating dialogue through arts & culture, she explores action-oriented hope as an alternative response to contemporary sociopolitical realities. She was born on the Mediterranean island of Malta, and is currently engaged as Public Policy Coordinator for the European Cultural Foundation (Amsterdam).

Fjorida Cenaj was born in 1997 in Lushnia, Albania. At a young age, she immigrated with her family to Greece.

Growing up, she felt a strong need to express herself through art and pursued film directing studies in Athens. Her art seamlessly blends visual expression, language, and movement – the body. She draws her inspiration primarily from her everyday experiences and is deeply interested in social issues, the concept of identity (related to migration and gender) and mental health matters. She believes in collectives and group dynamics and the positive influences they can have within society.

Manuela Colacicco is a contemporary dance emerging choreographer. She blends artistic creativity with social responsibility.

Collaborating on diverse projects nationally and internationally, she embodies a commitment to inclusive and innovative contemporary dance practices and aesthetics.

Elena Corradi (b. 1995) lives in Marseille and works between France and Italy. She holds degrees in photography from the École Nationale Supérieure de la Photographie in Arles and in anthropology from the University Paris X-Nanterre.

In her practice she analyzes the complex relationships between body, space and memory through an approach based on images. By combining photography, video and archival materials, she explores and brings out marginal narratives and plural points of view. Her latest projects take place around borders, whether between two countries or between urban and rural areas. She has been selected for the Nouveau Grand Tour art residency program in 2023, with the support of the Institut Français of Italy and Palazzo Butera in Palermo.

Maria Francesca De Tullio is assistant professor in Constitutional Law (Federico II University of Naples).

She also worked at University of Antwerp, within the project Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities. As an activist of l'Asilo, she is engaged in skill sharing with political movements on creative use of law. Her main gender related research areas are: gender barriers in democracy, austerity and social rights, gender urbanism, online surveillance, and hate speech. She is currently manager and trainer in EU-funded projects on gender issues, concerning education and training for gender equity and anti-discriminatory AI. Within the Feministisation of Politics Collective, she works with own and allied political organisations to achieve a less patriarchal way of self-organising.

Billie Dibb works on and is the coordinator of the 'imagination' stream projects of European Alternatives, using artistic practice to experiment with "doing politics". They have an academic background in International Politics, with a focus on gendered nationalism and big data. Billie founded the feminist queer witch collective in Paris, 'La Voisin', an exhbo-cum-party creating a space for feminist thought and artistic expression. Billie is currently passionate about queer ecologies and the philosophy of rights of nature, they also play with the creative possibilities of new technologies in the arts and how they can facilitate social change.

Fabian Dunst works as a climate activist for the Fridays for Future campaign "Wir Fahren Zusammen". Gathering bus and train drivers' needs for better working conditions, as well as the society's need for a better public transport system he works locally and networks nationwide. Besides studying culture studies and management (in Germany) his research projects focus on Perpetrator perspectives during the holocaust and the new far right movement on Social Media. His artistic roots are in theatre, film and photography.

Emma Grima is a Maltese socially engaged interdisciplinary artist in the Netherlands and Malta, specialising in documentary photography and fine arts. Her practice focuses on human rights, sexuality and identity with the aim to spark change, educate and empower others through the intersection of art and activism.

Emma Hanny combines activism, new-media-/ bio-art, photography, and natural sciences. She uses storytelling to act as an agent of change and the heart of her work is climate justice. She is intrigued by systems and doesn't shy away from changing them.

Zeynep Karlıdağ is a former rider for Gorillas and one of the founding members of the Gorillas Workers Collective. She is currently pursuing her master's at Friedrich Schiller University Jena and working as a student research assistant for Fairwork project, based at the Oxford Internet Institute and the WZB Berlin Social Science Center.

Magid Magid is a passionate disrupter. He is a Somali-British author who came to the UK as a refugee aged five. He is the Founder & Director of Union of Justice, a European, independent, people of colour (POC) led organisation dedicated to racial justice and climate justice, which European Alternatives' invited to the 2024 Fluctuations festivals. He was a member of the European Parliament representing Yorkshire & the Humber, Mayor of his beloved city (Sheffield), and an elected councillor representing his community. He sits on the Board of Trustees for the EU think tank 'Friends of Europe', the arts university 'The University of the Underground' and is Chair of the refugee charity 'Safe Passage International'. Magid was named one of TIME's 100 Rising Stars Shaping the Future of the World, One Young World Politician of the Year 2019, European Young Leader 2019 and recently received an honorary doctorate from the University of York for Politics. Magid is also a custard connoisseur.

Ophélie Masson coordinates the programmes that aim at developing and implementing sustainable tools of participative democracy such as citizens assemblies and ECIs. She also co-coordinates the Citizens Take Over Europe coalition. She focuses on defining new common narratives for citizens and residents of Europe who wish to enhance their political participation through innovative processes. As such, she is deeply involved in expanding European Alternatives partnerships with CSOs and movements that focus on training key individuals who develop and replicate diverse experimental citizens assemblies methodologies. She has created and led campaigns at EU level, engaging with actors ranging from grassroots organisations to the European institutions. Ophélie is also an LGBTQI activist and co-chair of the Board of IGLYO. She is also a Board Member of EUMANS, an organisation aiming at promoting civic participation through various instruments such as citizens assemblies, ECIs and petitions.

Niccolò Milanese is a poet and one of the founding directors of European Alternatives. He fosters the development of the organisation, its staff and the ecosystem around European Alternatives and is the focal point for the 'learn' stream of our work. He is currently a fellow of BI-Europe in Venice. In addition to longstanding work on transnationalism and political imaginaries, his current interests are in the planetary politics of desire, democratic education and fluid identities. His latest book is 'Illiberal Democracies in Europe: An Authoritarian response to the crisis of liberalism' available freely here. He was previously a Europe's Futures Fellow at IWM, Vienna, a visiting fellow at PUC Rio-De Janeiro, at UNAM Mexico, and at EUI School of Transnational Governance in Florence. He has been involved in founding numerous civil society initiatives and magazines in Europe and across the Mediterranean. He was educated in Cambridge, Siena and Paris.

Sofía Moreno Domínguez is a PhD candidate of Leisure, Culture and Communication for Human Development (University of Deusto, Spain) researching about the rootedness of cultural projects in their territories. She is an independent artist and researcher of Espacio Común (Nalda) a collective rural lab in La Rioja.

Noemi Pittalà is a multidisciplinary activist and cultural professional from Palermo, working at the intersection of art and social inclusion. With a background in visual arts and theatre, she has specialized in communications within the cultural sector, focusing on creating connections and fostering community engagement. Her work emphasizes radical inclusion, collective care, and active youth participation. Following the Pop The Vote project, Noemi founded 800V, an activism initiative aimed at empowering young people in Southern Italy. She currently works as Communications Assistant at EA.

Leon Stille is a dance maker and cultural agent in Europe. Across his diverse fields of work he advocates sustainability & radical collaboration. In recent years he joined creative forces with Collective Nest, fostering contemporary dance in Poland and beyond.

Dimitris Theologidis is a postgraduate student of International Relations and Strategic Studies in Athens, Greece. Having a background in Journalism and Mass Communications, he is interested in communication campaigns, media literacy and active citizenship education.

Ava Vales Toledano is an activist with Toutes des Femmes, a transfeminist association that campaigns for women's rights. She is responsible for sport at Toutes des Femmes and lobbies for the rights of trans people in high-performance sports.

Csenge Schneider-Lonhart is an activist based in Berlin working for European Alternatives in the imagine stream projects. Her background is predominantly in theatre, and she is currently working on the 'Theatre of the Oppressed' project, using theatre to empower and inspire citizens in demanding their political rights. Csenge is also part of the movement Social Housing NOW!, which is a local movement for public housing and housing justice.

Shalini Randeria was elected as president and rector of Central European University in 2021. She is the first woman, and the first person from the Global South, to take up this position since the founding of the university 30 years ago. Randeria has had a distinguished academic career as a sociologist/social anthropologist at institutions of higher education across Europe. She was rector of the Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna, and a professor at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, where she directed the Albert Hirschman Centre on Democracy. Randeria holds the Excellence Chair at the University of Bremen, where she leads a research group on "soft authoritarianisms." She is deputy chair of the Class of Social and Related Sciences, Academia Europaea and a distinguished fellow of the Munk School, Toronto University. Randeria has published widely on the anthropology of globalization, law, the state, and social movements with a regional focus on India. Her influential podcast series, Democracy in Question, launched in 2021, is now in its ninth season.

Myriam Zekagh coordinates EA's programmes focused on youth and social movements, and monitors the impact of EA's activities through monitoring, evaluation and learning. Her work focuses on developing and evaluating projects with high social impact, engaging with local activists, civil society organisations and local authorities to create strong and long-lasting connections. She has lived and worked in and outside of Europe, most notably in Germany and North Africa.

Jacc Griffiths is from Wales and today lives in Paris. They are currently working on the Critical Change-Labs project at European Alternatives. Their background is in linguistics & pedagogy, and they are specialized in discourse analysis, critical sociolinguistics and semiotics. They are fascinated by intersecting ecosystems, rhizome-spaces, interdiscourse networks, and all things etymology.

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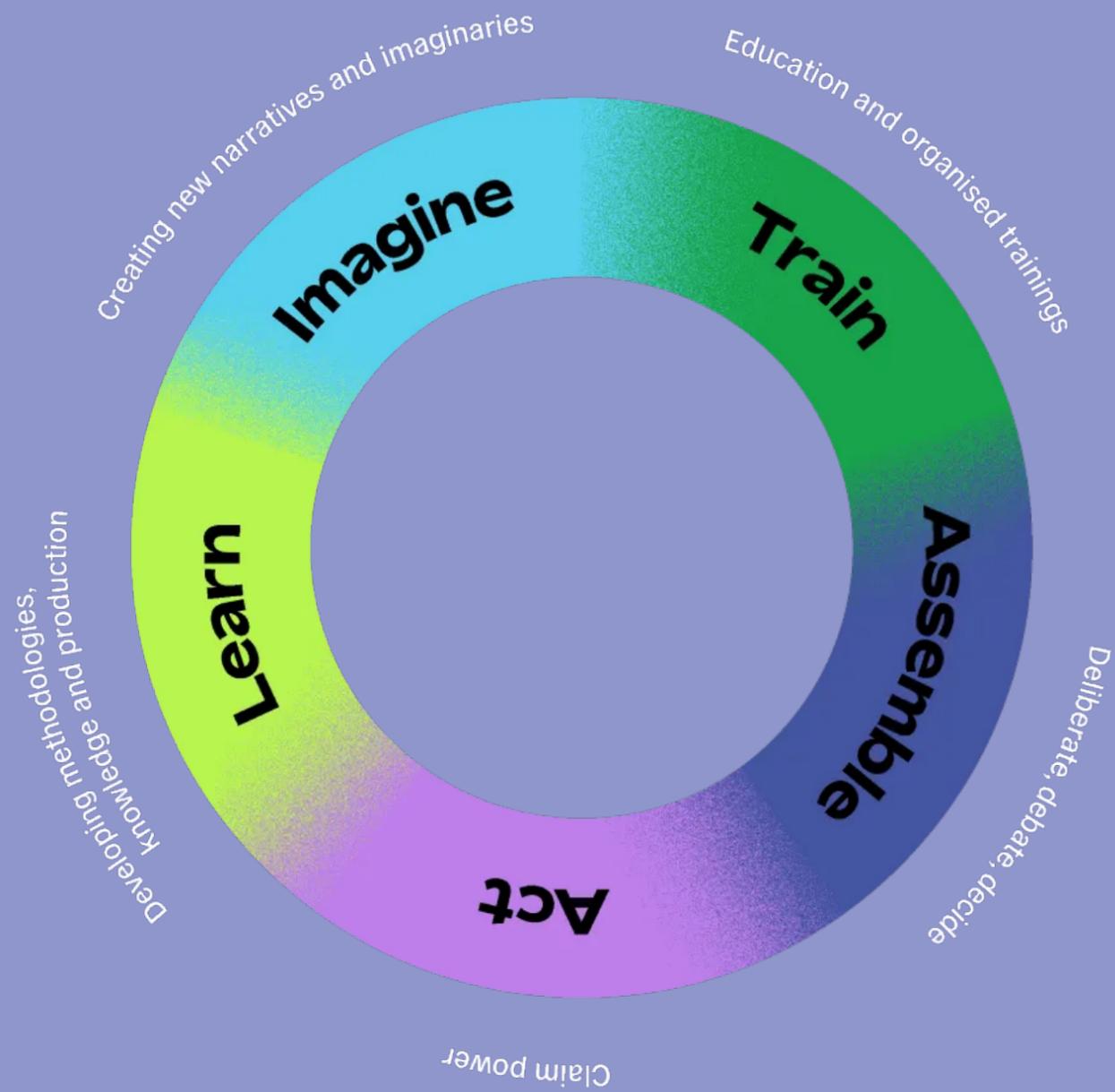
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European Alternatives is a transnational civil society organisation working since 2007 to promote democracy, equality and culture beyond the nation state. With the Journal of European Alternatives we want to open a space to map out visions, ideas and pathways for an alternative, open and radically more democratic Europe. In this special issue of our journal, we dedicate the different texts and pieces to present the initiatives and work we do to shed light on how they are structured and organised.

As with the initiatives at EA, the chapters in this issue are divided in the five streams that order our work: imagine, train, assemble, act and learn, keywords that encapsulate the vision we had for a new planetary system. In the following pages you will find more details about the way in which conceptualise our mission and strategy and about the people, ideas, processes and dreams that populate the work and path of EA.

We hope this issue can help readers get familiarized with our work, while critically thinking about the ideas and actions that are interacting to foster new connections, systems, temporalities and imaginaries. As in every other issue, we hope the journal can continue linking social movements, academics, civil society, artists, activists and the very earth we inhabit to build together and live the alternatives we dream.

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by Billie Dibb

The Imagine stream is a place to experiment in self-expression, using artistic innovation to create and play with new narratives, imaginaries, and representations, and offers diverse formats for learning and being together. European Alternatives' uses this approach to conceptualize new ways of doing democracy, questioning how we can make political space more accessible, creative, and joyful. Simply, European Alternatives' Imagine stream is the place where the alternatives can be imagined, and therefore this stream feeds and inspires all our other work in action, advocacy, training, and learning.

Although interconnected, the Imagine stream current work can be split into three key areas; creating spaces of being together, increasing accessibility to the political sphere, and, looking beyond & creating utopia.

Creating spaces of being together

In a political climate marked by growing infringements on citizens' rights, deepening political divisions, and distrust, creating spaces for collective empowerment has become an act of resistance and solidarity. Centered with feminist principles of care, European Alternatives' plays with formats of cultural events in the aims of fostering transnational collaboration, joy, and radical hope. TRANSEUROPA, our annual transnational artistic-political-cultural festival encapsulates this. The festival has a unique methodology of collaboration, shown through a format of translocality, each edition takes place in a new city and is co-curated between EA and local partners, with its audience, the festival brings together activists, artists, intellectuals, decision-makers, citizens and non-humans voices, and in content, events range from panel discussions to club nights, immersive networking events to exhibitions, assemblies to decolonial walks.

Increasing accessibility to the political sphere

We recognize that political institutions are built upon patriarchal and colonial power structures, and therefore inherently inaccessible to many of us. The Imagine stream aims to counter this by playing with experimental methodologies of doing politics and centering new and marginalized voices.

Practices of activism are often encouraged here, in collaboration with our advocacy work the Youth Movement Campaign Accelerator contained training encouraging participants to use artistic methods when advocating for their social justice campaigns. One of the participants Emma Grima went on to create the 'We Are Positive' campaign, an art installation and conversation space, wrapping Maltas LOVE Monument in HIV testing boxes to work against the stigma and

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highlight the human element of those living with HIV. Artists in other past projects such as Artsformation, a research project at the intersection of arts, technology, and society, used the medium of art to uncover some of the harms of new technologies, experiment with how to combat them, and empower others to do so. Our newly annual Marginal Litterature Festival in Seine-Saint-Denis promotes the voices of marginalized writers and those in marginalized spaces, by mixing the format of an academic forum and cultural event we seek to put new voices and methodologies into an institutional space.

Looking beyond & creating utopia

In order to offer real alternatives, we must not only experiment with methodologies that can work with and within our current political systems, but also collectively inspire revolutionary thought and utopias.

Currently the Imagine stream has been exploring human and non-human relations, with a focus on water, playing with our interconnected fluidity, questioning how we can move towards a world where an element has the same rights as a human, and what that means. Between the Fluctuations festivals, we invited political thinkers, scientists, and artists into week-long residencies on a boat, to explore Fluid Connections. The residences accumulated in a public installation and performance around the voice of water, and creative citizen assemblies on rights of water bodies, offering a public engaging format of ecological activism and interspecies advocacy, where we can collectively inspire each other.

In this chapter, the journal opens with Engagement and the arts in Europe by Niccolò Milanese, EA director, exploring some of the initial ideas that started the imagine stream and Transeuropa festivals, Elena Corradi, artist in residency, then translates this theory into modern-day practise by describing her residency with Fondazione Studio Rizoma process to create A Possible Landscape, a multi-vocal narration « from » the margins of the city exploring the liquid relationships between landscape, language and memory. Finally, Noemi Pittala, EA comms assistant, presents activist projects by Pop The Vote changemakers, a network utilizing art for democracy, whom we can draw inspiration from.

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Engagement

and the Arts

Niccolò Milanese

in Europe

This article was originally published in Europa, written by one of European Alternatives' founding directors, Niccolò Milanese, in 2008 on the relationship between arts and engagement in Europe before European Alternatives' Cultural Congress in their 2008 London Festival of Europe.

This festival, and the ideas of imagination & culture being at the heart of creating a democratic and equal Europe, are a birthpoint to what has become Transeuropa festival in over 31 cities since 2007, and the objectives of the imagination stream.

From now on we live in imaginary communities. From when we cowered together in fear of the earliest thunderbolts of Zeus, the imagination has been the fundamental human faculty holding us together, but the specificity of large parts of the modern world is that we live in communities knowing full-well they are imaginary. The comparative ease with which many of us can cross geographical obstacles, globalised communications and the speed with which demographics is changing all call us to question what holds us together, and the only remaining answer is a shared imagination. To say that communities are imaginary is not at all to say they are false: on the contrary, it is to say they are absolutely real in virtue of shared imaginative spaces, the only spaces in which human communities can exist.

Europe is at the forefront of this global movement. Here, where there is so much by which communities could be defined and divided, when the defence and demarcation of different cultures, nations, religions, languages has taken up so much of our resources and blood, we are finally thrown forwards towards an identity no-one but wily old Zeus can fully capture: European. All attempts at saying what is or is not European necessarily fail, because they misunderstand the nature of the adjective: *European* is a way of *carrying on*, it is an endless process of self-creation. Some of us once made the disastrous mistake of thinking we had grasped for once and for all what Europe is and could impose it on others. From now on Europe can only progress by including its alterities. The imagination is the only structure which has the required property of being open to others whilst not destroying their difference. The imagination is the structure of negative capability.

The responsibility of those who tend to the imagination could not be higher.

Not only do they have the responsibility for caring for the resources which hold our communities together, but they also

“Some of us once made the disastrous mistake of thinking we had grasped for once and for all what Europe is and could impose it on others. From now on Europe can only progress by including its alterities. The imagination is the only structure which has the required property of being open to others whilst not destroying their difference.”

London Transeuropa Festival 2011 © European Alternatives



have the responsibility for tending to those resources in such a way that we do not define ourselves against one another, that we do not foreclose differences too quickly. **They have the responsibility for turning civilisations inside-out.** The Europeans, living after and in spite of the many collapses of their own 'civilisations', have a historic duty.

Who are those who tend to the imagination? For us they are to begin with archetypes we have inherited from antiquity: the poet, the writer, the painter, the sculptor, the musician, the dancer, the philosopher, the critic. The imaginative tools we inherit as Europeans have been shaped and developed by these figures from the beginning of history, and they each carry a particular historical charge and character.

There are archetypes we have invented more recently, which are technological developments of the older archetypes: the photographer, the film maker, the TV producer, the radio script writer, the web designer. Technological developments in communications have opened up entirely new domains for the imagination to fill. The modern world is increasingly structured according to these new technologies of communication. Like all features of the modern world, that is a huge opportunity as well as a huge danger, which means

Playdate at Transeuropa Festival 2023 in Cluj-Napoca © Tamás Márkos



to say it is a heavy responsibility. The danger is that the new technologies used inhumanely and unimaginatively tend to be alienating and solipsistic. The structures and prerogatives of technology are not automatically the same structures and prerogatives as those of human understanding, and they are by default private and personal, despite their apparent claim to opening intersubjective spaces. The new technologies of communication employ the modes of expression which belong to the arts, but do so impersonally. **So long as the communities created via new technology remain merely 'virtual', they will not be human communities at all.** They require the artist to make them real. The huge opportunity opened up by new technologies of communication is to give to the artist complete and direct influence over the state of real interpersonal relations by the exercise of his or her imagination. A feature of new technologies is that in using them each and every one of us is required to be an artist in this sense.

Europe is not a giant translation machine.

For translation to be worthwhile there must be languages to translate between. The huge richness of the languages of Europe is an extremely good reason for being grateful that the language of Europe is not (only) translation. The languages we inhabit, which enter into us and structure the way we understand the world, are one of the ways our cultural and historical inheritance is given to us. Language is part of the living organism that we are, and requires the same attention, care, preservation and innovation. For a long time the languages of Europe have not belonged to any one people; in virtue of translation, but also in virtue of individual and collective multilingualism and as a side effect of domination. The search for a perfect language is perhaps a peculiarly European search, which has fascinated the most powerful of our thinkers and poets. But if they have been impassioned by this search, it is because they felt the richness of all the languages in Europe: the power of languages leads to awe, the diversity of equally rich languages to the idea of an even greater language.

“The huge dangers are that ‘culture’ once again becomes understood as something ‘pure’ and exclusionary, and Europe falls back on itself and fully collapses; the huge opportunity is that Europe can re-imagine itself as a community based on justice and inclusion.”

The European fascination for languages tends to distract from other modes of communication in the arts other than literature-on-the-page. But many of the same questions can be put with regards to these other modes as are raised with regards to language: are there different 'languages' of sculpture or dance, which might vary throughout Europe? It is probably mistaken to imperiously extend the paradigm of language to cover these means of expression: language is one amongst them. At the very least we can say in general about the arts that there are different traditions, different costumes, different customs, different canons spread throughout Europe. And furthermore we can say that from the beginning, in Europe, these traditions and customs have been inescapably mixed and shared, even when the greatest efforts have been made to keep them 'pure'.

But the contemporary European might regard the customs, costumes and canons he or she has 'inherited' as entirely foreign, and the idea of tradition something that has been overthrown by modernism. The apocalyptic visions of Europe's cultural fate are well known. George Steiner often paints an image of TS Eliot and Ezra Pound rushing through Europe collecting artefacts from the museums before the collapse. Paul Valéry paints the image of a European Hamlet in the graveyard of European culture, picking up the skulls he at first does not recognise. This one is Leonardo's, that one is Leibniz. What is he to do with these skulls? If he abandons them, will he be abandoning himself?

The solution to the cultural impasse is revalorisation and re-appropriation, as well as innovation in the arts. To say that the European artist finds himself emerging from an intellectual heritage is not to say he or she must be burdened by it, or reverential towards it. Indeed it is to say the contrary: it is to say that the European artist must move from where he finds himself, taking account of where that is. Revalorisation and innovation are no longer opposites. The various imaginative spaces in Europe are all of them historically conditioned, as all the communities in Europe are historically conditioned. To be a European innovator in the arts is to give a reinterpretation of these conditions, albeit implicitly. If there has been a

collapse of European culture – and I suspect to totalise the collapse is to go too far – then the response and the responsibility is to reinterpret European culture after the collapse. And whatever the actual state of European culture, it can no longer look only to itself for its resources. Not only have elements of European culture entered the entire world, been taken up by others, deconstructed and rebuilt, but all the world has entered Europe: every god of almost every culture the world has known has left some traces here. Europe is not primarily a geographical space: it is a continual attempt to give some value to its own history. **Mnemosyne is the mother of the muses, and the family of the muses is more diverse than ever before.**

The predicament of the European Hamlet can be generalised to encompass the contemporary spirit of Europe: at an impasse, always in a 'period of reflection', nervous, hesitant. All that I have said suggests that the role of the artist in Europe is fundamental for moving beyond this. The European legislator has only the resources he is rendered by those who care for the imagination. He or she has the diverse histories and traditions of Europe – which implicitly involve all the world. The legislator has the fears and hopes of the diverse peoples in Europe. But these can only be employed to govern positively if they are nurtured into a healthy shape. If not, the legislator relies only on force. The engagement of the artist is precisely here: the artist carries the responsibility for the care of the imaginative resources of the Europeans, the only means by which a European community can be built. This engagement is fundamentally political in the sense of continually re-generating a European polis, of re-generating European ways of living together. This imaginative re-generation can only take place at a European level, in contemporary Europe, because all the potential substantives around which communities can be built have been shown to fail. From now on communities can only be built as ways of carrying on, as ways of striving and aspiring: for us, under these skies, Europe as an ideal describes these ways.

The political engagement called for is therefore more fundamental than left-or-right surface distinctions in political

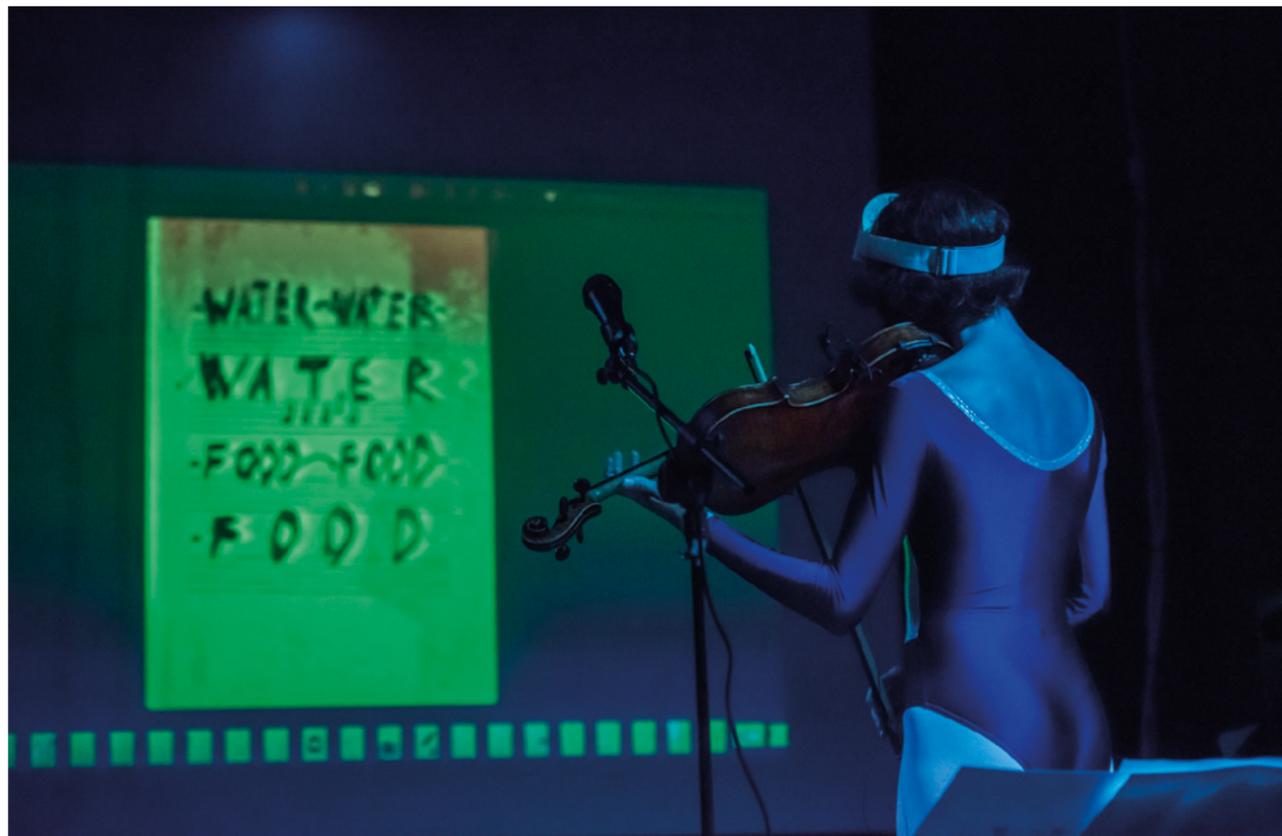
programs. It is much commented that the surface distinctions of political programs are increasingly only a façade, and that no real political choices remain. In so far as any real modern political program relies both on an interpretation of history and a project for the future, all that I have said suggests that it is only by the kind of cultural engagement here advocated at the fundamental level that these choices will reappear.

If the meaning of political engagement in the arts for Europe is now at this fundamental level, it will nevertheless be articulated and realised with respect to particular conflicts and political causes in particular places at particular times: be these at the level of immediate human survival or human rights, or be they intellectual and artistic. It is by definition impossible to speak for all of Europe, for all time. Therefore the artistic engagement that will contribute to the generation of a European polis will be variegated through different levels of generality: from geographically highly specific conflicts to issues that concern directly the whole world. But at each of these levels these causes can be fought for as a *European act* by Europeans. To say that is just to say that Europeans, inescapably caught up in their own history, engage politically as *Europeans*.

The calls for a 'European soul', for 'culture' in Europe from the political classes are often naïve and sometimes obfusatory, but they are consistently present and more and more loudly heard. Like all things in modern Europe, that presents a huge opportunity as well as huge dangers. The huge

dangers are that 'culture' once again becomes understood as something 'pure' and exclusionary, and Europe falls back on itself and fully collapses; the huge opportunity is that Europe can re-imagine itself as a community based on justice and inclusion. The opportunities are there to be taken: Europa is still just about visible ahead of us. Perhaps if we lose sight of her we will be lucky enough to find another guide, but if we are not it will be our own fault.

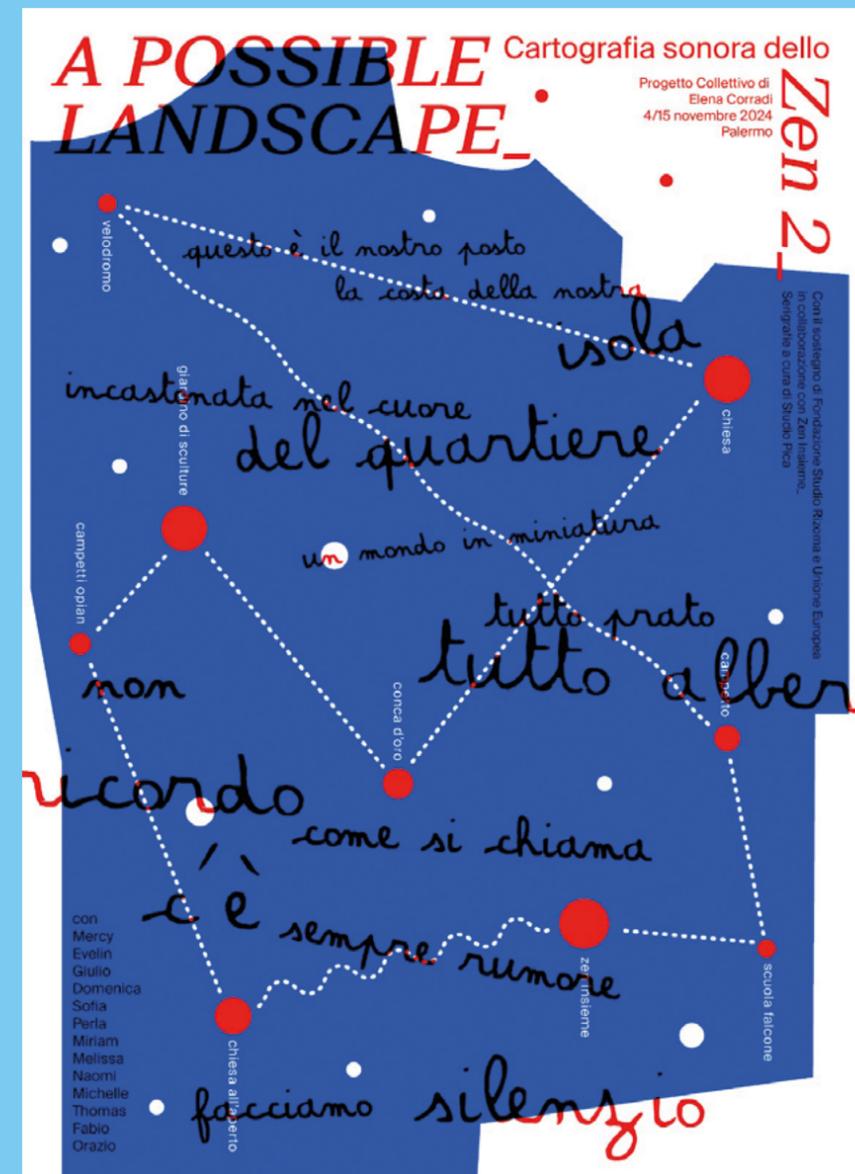
Ruth Kemna interpreting the voice of water at Transeuropa Festival 2024 in Venice
© Claudia Correnti



A Possible Landscape

On the process of narrating «from» rather than «on» the margins

Elena Corradi



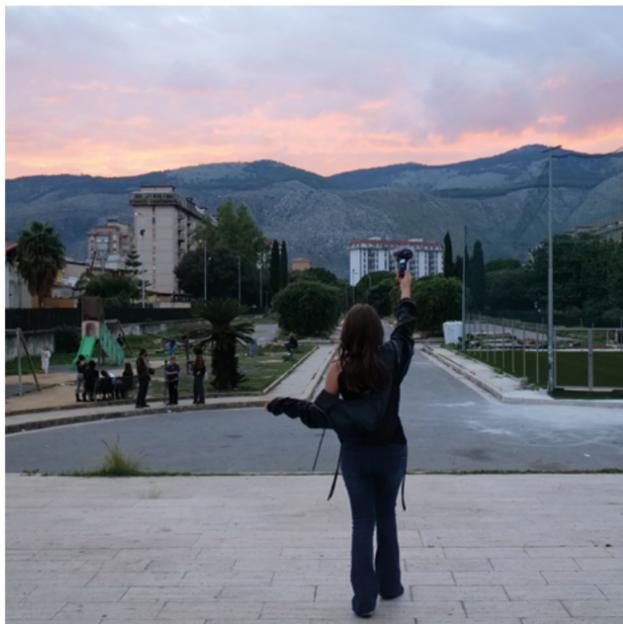
«Still there are seeds to be gathered,
and room in the bag of stars.»

Ursula K. Le Guin

The city of Palermo has undergone a brutal, fast process of urban expansion since its historical center has been hardly affected by 2WW's bombings first and, a few years later, by the well known Belice's earthquake¹. These major events led to a housing crisis that prompted politicians and entrepreneurs to start large construction sites from which they could make large incomes in a short time: suddenly, space was needed. The land on which Palermo was founded is surrounded by mountains on one side and the sea on the other. Protected and fertile, this land has been rich in gardens and citrus groves for centuries thanks to the interventions of the Arabs who knew how to plan advanced water management systems. When building sites began to appear following approved master plans overnight, the landscape of the so-called 'Conca d'oro' was radically transformed.

I really became interested in this evocative myth of a lost paradise when I found out that a shopping centre built in 2011 brought itself the name of 'Conca d'oro'. An interesting point to underline is that this shopping centre was built next to the ZEN district, in the Northern suburbs of Palermo, where thousands of people massively moved from the city centre between the 60s and 70s, in the frame of the housing crisis mentioned before. As a visual artist, I felt questioned by the feeling of confusion that hovers over the meaning of this name and by the extreme diversity of the images that this name re-

¹ Belice's earthquake took place in 1968.



calls. So, How can a shopping centre evoke citrus groves that no longer exist? What is the 'Conca d'oro' for young people who have not been able to know what was there before? And for those who were there before, what does 'Conca d'oro' mean today? But also: how to narrate this complex territory, both physical and imaginary, without appropriating a story that belongs to someone else?

With the support of Fondazione Studio Rizoma, and thanks to the precious collaboration of a local association², I was able to invite a group of young people from the ZEN district to explore their neighborhood together through the practice of sound walking. Sound seemed to me an interesting tool for the attempt of activating an *other* narration of this very particular place, far from the degrading images spread by the media. Inspired by the feminist practice of radical cartography - or counter-mapping - and by the urban explorations led by the Italian collective *Stalker*, those sound walks wish to encourage an approach to space that includes the experience of those who inhabit it, use it and cross it daily.

During three weeks the kids and I met regularly. Our very first working session focussed on the creation of a map to follow, tracing the main trajectory of the sound walks. They freely suggested all the places that they considered as relevant for many reasons: among them, the 'Conca d'oro' shopping centre was the core of our exploration. « It is our place », a young girl once said, « the one where we hang out with friends, we celebrate our birthdays or we simply go shopping. It is the coast of our island ». Then we started to go out and visit each one of these places that the kids described through their personal use or, in the case of abandoned places, through the stories they had heard or, finally, imagining a desirable future for them. The participatory approach of the project resulted in an active and shared use of microphones so that everyone could record sounds, voices and interviews. A lot of things also happened while we were moving from a place to another (according to Hamish Fulton, the act of walking itself may be considered as part of the artwork). At the end of each session I had to deal with several hours of recordings from different microphones and only then I could eventually discover all the stories and micro-events that I could not fully catch while we were outside. Each time I had a deeper access to the kids' perspective through their own voices. And their voices are as precious as habitually unheard.

The mainstream narration of ZEN district comes, as I said before, from the media and the institutions. In other words, it comes from a symbolic centre and it is more a narrating « on » rather than « from » the margins of the city. What we tried to do through this process is to invert the point of

² Laboratorio Zen Insieme.



Workshop session in Palermo, Elena Corradi

view and to question the pretended neutrality of any form of narration. The result is the audio documentary « A Possible Landscape », a multi vocal narration that aims to deliver a subjective experience situated in space and aims to question this centre-marginal dichotomy, with a particular attention to the memory of places as well as their possible future. The relationships between landscape, language and memory are liquid. The same word may convey different images through time and it is in this very mutation process that we can imagine things differently.

POP THE VOTE. Culture On The Ballot

Artivism as a Call to Action
for Democracy

The entire group of Changemakers during the Brussels Bootcamp in February 2024, captured here during an activist action led by Artist Network at Gare du Midi in Brussels © Eduvigis Sardà Sánchez



In an era where democratic participation is increasingly vulnerable, and the gap between citizens and European institutions continues to widen, creative approaches to civic engagement are more essential than ever. Pop The Vote, a project led by the European network Culture Action Europe and coordinated by Maya Weisinger, highlights the powerful intersection of art and activism.

It confronts us with the precarious state of democracy, urging us to stand for a society that is participatory, inclusive, and active—a mission perfectly aligned with the work we champion at European Alternatives.

We first encountered Pop The Vote and its Changemakers during their networking event at the European Parliament this February, held as part of their training week during the Brussels Bootcamp organized with Artist Network. The alignment between our shared belief in the power of activism to drive civic participation was immediately clear.

Pop The Vote accomplished this by giving a platform to 40 young artists from 14 EU countries, equipping them with tools, training, inspiration and funds to organize events that mobilize their communities—especially marginalized and underrepresented groups—to participate in the 2024 European Parliamentary elections.

Pop The Vote's journey reached another milestone in Malmö, where Culture Action Europe invited the group to join their annual Beyond The Obvious conference as Changemakers. This event provided participants with a unique opportunity to present their projects to a diverse and influential network of European cultural organizations. During the conference, Stephanie Bonnici, changemaker from Malta, now based in Rotterdam, delivered a compelling reflection on the urgency of our times, underscoring the need for *'Radical Hope'*. She outlined three pathways for building a future where young and old generations can work together more effectively¹:

- **Connection:** Addressing the epidemic of loneliness and fostering real-world interactions to counteract individualism.

- **Empowerment through intergenerational collaboration: Creating genuine opportunities for young and older generations to learn from each other, avoiding tokenism, integrating young people into decision-making processes, ensuring fair compensation, and embracing the discomfort of diversity as a strength.**
- **Radical Hope: Acknowledging our collective hopes, imagining alternative futures for the world, and taking bold actions to realize those aspirations.**

This vision of Radical Hope is a cornerstone of Pop The Vote’s philosophy, emphasizing that in times of uncertainty, we must dare to imagine and work toward a better future. It reflects the spirit of the project itself—transforming frustration and challenges into creativity, collaboration, and meaningful civic engagement.

Each initiative inspired by Pop The Vote reflects the cultural and political landscapes of its creators, while contributing to a shared goal: making democracy not only accessible but profoundly engaging. Here are some of the projects:

1. [On connection, intergenerational collaboration, and radical hope for urgent times | by Stephanie Bonnici | Medium](#)

STORIES FOR HOPE

By Stephanie Bonnici, The Netherlands

How can one approach strangers and encourage them to vote in the European elections without first recognising their personal realities and the external forces shaping their experience of Europe and the world? This was the question behind STORIES FOR HOPE’s pilot encounters in Rotterdam, where individuals from all walks of life were invited to explore themes of hope and democracy together with artists and creatives who led writing and ceramics workshops. Inspired by Rebecca Solnit’s *Hope in the Dark*, the project framed hope as a political act and a positive force for grassroots action. Two workshops—one in writing, co-led by Salomé Attias and Ruth Borg, and one in ceramics, co-led by Jolien van Oostende, Pilar del Amo Garcia, and Ruth Borg—offered spaces for participants to process hopelessness and envision alternative futures.

The workshops were held at two volunteer-run venues - Stadskwekerij De Kas and Leeszaal Rotterdam West - both of which came to exist from a spirit of grassroots change and community action. They aimed to bring ‘un-like-minded’

individuals together, hosting a space in which diverse ages, cultures, and backgrounds can reflect on their shared hopes and hopelessness. Activism played a central role, enabling participants to engage creatively with democratic themes and to counter narratives of fear and polarisation. The project underscored the ability of art to bring communities together, empower reflection, inspire action, and bridge divides.



A moment of connection at the STORIES FOR HOPE writing workshop in Stadskwekerij De Kas Rotterdam © Gabriel Agius Pascallidis

Mani(nuestro). Our Common Manifesto

By Sofia Moreno Domínguez, Spain (Nalda, La Rioja)

Mani(nuestro) is a collection of 84 testimonies about the feeling of local (Riojan) and European belonging, based on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, which provokes reflection on physiology, security, belonging, recognition and self-realization. It is therefore a collective fanzine that offers some diverse truths from the privacy of each person’s handwriting. The first series of anonymous testimonies took place on Sunday 7 April 2024, during the Plum Blossom Festival, in the Plaza de la Tela of Nalda (La Rioja). In this rural setting, 46 texts were collected, with the collaboration of PANAL, El Colletero and Espacio Común. The second round of testimonies was attended by 38 people and took place on Thursday 9th May in La Gota de Leche in Logroño, as part of the ‘Mani(nuestro)’ capacity building. Cooperation between the local, the European and the global, coordinated by Mindchangers and CONGDCAR.



Front part of the fanzine, project Mani(nuestro) © Sofia Moreno Domínguez

Cultterra’s Project

By Fjorida Cenaj, Greece (Elefsina, Attika)

Cultterra’s project was a vibrant activist party that seamlessly blended celebration with civic engagement, bringing the community together to reimagine the role of public spaces and encourage participation in shaping their future. The event revolved around three key experiences: a playful ballot-box activity where attendees voiced their opinions on ARKOPO-LIS and public space rights; an inspiring video screening by Timecircuit Collective, showcasing the transformation of cultural spaces; and a high-energy party with Eurodance beats curated by the Arvanite Pistols DJ duo.

Targeted primarily at youth, the initiative aimed to spark meaningful conversations about public spaces, cultural heritage, and civic participation, particularly in the context of the upcoming European Elections. By combining fun, education, and activism, the event demonstrated the power of activism in mobilizing communities. It proved that civic issues can be engaging and accessible, transforming abstract concepts into tangible, shared experiences that inspire collective action and joy. This dynamic fusion of creativity and activism captured the spirit of “Pop the Vote,” making participation in societal matters a celebration rather than an obligation.



[Image 3 here] Caption: ARKOPOLL the party! Official Poster © David Suls

Active EU Citizens

By Dimitris Theologidis, Greece

Building on the skills and insights gained during the project, Dimitris launched an initiative titled “Active EU Citizens”, organizing and presenting two school events in May 2024 in Drama, Greece. These events targeted young students, fostering awareness of the importance of voting and active participation in democratic processes. The school events, which coincided with the Day of Europe, began with a musical performance by the School Symphony Orchestra. Dimitris then delivered a presentation on the significance of the European Parliamentary elections, with the support of Europe Direct Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. The events concluded with an interactive quiz game on Kahoot, created by Dimitris, where students tested their knowledge of EU-related topics. The winner received a symbolic gift from the European Parliament. The initiative reached over 300 students, teachers, and parents, combining music, education, and interactivity to inspire young citizens to think critically and actively engage in democratic life. By blending artistic expression with civic education, this project empowered young people to see themselves as integral contributors to the future of Europe.



Symphonic Orchestra of the Musical School of Drama, celebrating the day of Europe, 25 April 2024 © Dimitris Theologidis

Use your democratic voice - cultural event & discussion

By Fabian Dunst, Germany

Designed as an open and inclusive gathering in the heart of the city, the event aimed to encourage dialogue about democracy and the European Union in the lead-up to the 2024 European Parliamentary elections. The evening began with a panel discussion featuring prominent voices from various fields.

MEP Bernd Lange (Chairman of the Fair Trade Working Group), Prof. Dr. Ulrich Brückner (EUROPE DIRECT), Björn von Lindeiner (Youth Department, City of Hildesheim), and Konstantin Gerbrich (volunteer, Pulse of Europe Hildesheim) shared their perspectives on the intersection of politics, academia, and grassroots activism. Audience members were actively involved, contributing questions and comments that added depth to the discussion.

Artistic performances enriched the event, highlighting the role of culture in fostering political awareness. The jazz-funk band Bernadette and poetry slam artist Lina Roß captivated the audience, creating an atmosphere that celebrated creativity while emphasizing democratic participation.

To further engage the public, interactive questions were displayed on the venue's windows, inviting both attendees and passersby to share their thoughts and concerns about the EU. This visual dialogue extended beyond the event, remaining on display throughout the election period, and serving as a lasting reminder of the community's voice in shaping the future of Europe.



Caption: Interactive Window „What can the EU politics do for yourself?“ © Michael Dunst

The event organizer reflected on the value of the experience, noting how it offered an opportunity to merge a passion for the arts with meaningful socio-political debate.

Walk and Talk

By Leon Casper Stille, Germany

Inspired by Lucius Burckhardt's Strollology, the public intervention “Walk and Talk” works towards a reframing of conversations on politics. Why? During the past few decades the far right has gained ground in Germany whilst ambiguity tolerance among all streams of society is fading. Open, tolerant and accessible conversational spaces are rare to find. Hence this project invites people, roaming in public space, to simply go on a little walk. During the stroll, a walking buddy facilitates a guided yet open conversation on democracy, culture and politics. Guests are invited to share their thoughts on the discussed topics, whether those be spoken out loud during the walk or written on an individual card after the walk's conclusion. As it turns out, the walking buddies are performing artists and spontaneously share an excerpt of their art form with the guests, on the spot. The element of surprise, gentle live music, an open space for lingering and an offer of fresh snacks allow this experience of talking about democracy to be a positive one. The temporary public action reaches bystanders of all ages and backgrounds, inviting both locals and visitors. It has been conducted in Weimar and Erfurt, both in Thuringia, Germany.



“Walk and Talk” took place in front of Weimar's city castle © Henry Sowinski

800V project

By Noemi Pittalà and Manuela V. Colacicco, Southern Italy

Rooted in the streets of Palermo, where the symbol “800A” embodies rebellion and liberation, 800V flips the “A,” transforming emotion into action.

V stands for Voices, Votes, and the will to transform. Born thanks to Pop The Vote, 800V is a collective, feminist, and youth-driven activism initiative led by Sicilian artist Noemi Pittalà and Apulian artist Manuela V. Colacicco, forging connections between marginalized communities in Southern Italy and Europe. Through performances, workshops, and public events, 800V engaged over 250 participants from Palermo to Rome during the campaign for the 2024 European elections.

Highlights included a theatrical performance by a young Italian company, paired with a talk on “Youth and the Future” with Monreale’s Youth Council; a workshop in Palermo with an association supporting youth in educational poverty, where first-time voters explored the 11 European Youth Goals, with quality education emerging as their top priority; and a dance performance choreographed by Julia Rudzyk, which delved into themes of resilience, solidarity, and collective action. Beyond the elections, 800V remains active in its

mission. Recently, the project organized a community dinner in Gioia del Colle, Puglia, as part of the *Emersi. Culture della superficie* festival, reaffirming its dedication to amplifying diverse voices during a critical period for democracy. By advocating for activism, 800V continues to inspire both local and transnational actions, bridging divides and empowering communities through creative expression.

Gino Campanella and Noemi Pittalà during the intergenerational talk ‘Cultural Traditions Shaping Europe’s Future for Youth’ at the Sicilian puppet theater ‘Conca d’Oro’ in Palermo © Silvia Pittalà



Europa schaffen: discorsi fotografici

By Emma Hanny, Italy/Austria

“The camera is an instrument that teaches people how to see without it.” And not only that. Photography gives the chance to look, listen, think, play, be curious and reframe with all our senses and our whole body. It literally encourages us to question and change perspectives. This is what lies behind the project, which was brought to life in the city of Bolzano in Italy, thanks to the Pop the Vote project. A group of students between the ages of 17 and 19 were given the space to explore photography as a tool for storytelling and for expressing their values. Two core questions lead the work: How does the European Union impact your life? What values do you stand for and what would you like the EU to stand for?

Keeping those in mind Emma, as facilitator and the group of students went out to the city and started taking pictures. With the results from our Photo Walk we co-created a little exhibition for their classmates and some other classes from different schools.

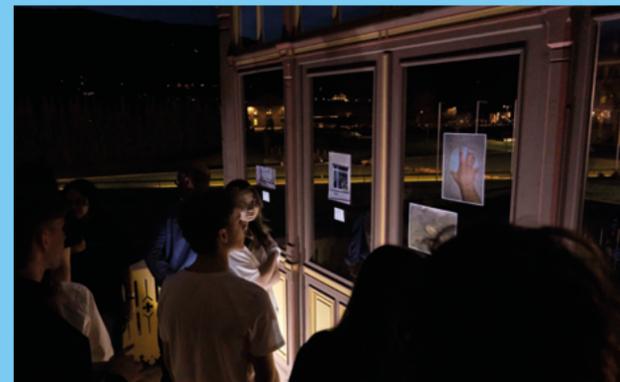
This work shows that not only the final artworks should be celebrated but rather the processes of critical thinking and creation behind the work. Photography is one way for those processes to happen and this might be a good framework for democracy to be lived through art, play and experimentation.

The impact of Pop The Vote also appears within European Alternatives’ own projects, as two Changemakers have directly contributed to EA’s initiatives. Noemi Pittalà has since joined EA’s team, bringing the insights of the Pop The Vote network into ongoing efforts to promote democracy, inclusivity, and collaboration with a transnational approach.

Emma Hanny was an artist-in-residence aboard the Fluctuations project, traveling by boat from Brussels to Utrecht, exploring how cultural practices can engage communities along Europe’s waterways.

We are thrilled to present the project developed by Emma, in collaboration with fellow artist-in-residence Filippo Gonnella, during the Fluctuations residency ‘Fluid Connections’. Their work invites audience participation, encouraging engagement by scanning the QR code or following [this link](#) to become part of the experience.

Final exhibition of the workshop in Bolzano, Italy © Emma Hanny



Europa schaffen: discorsi fotografici

By Emma Hanny and Filippo Gonnella, Italy/Austria

“Hello fellow nymphs!

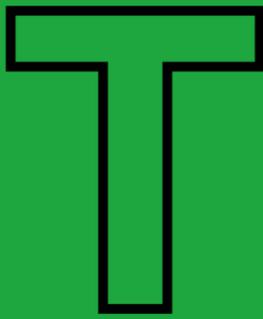
We are the nymph helpline, acting in the interest of Gaya, the god of earth.

Our goal is to improve the life of nymphs living next to the species homo sapiens, whose behaviour and role in the ecological community is yet to be deciphered.

This research is the beginning of a bigger intervention and can help us with directing the form and content of our work. We would like to deeper understand your encounters with humans and consider you as an important messenger for our investigation.

Thank you for your help by filling in this questionnaire and we hope you have a wonderful day!”





by Jana Ahlers



Build capacity to embed education and training in every step of transformative action by imagining, conceptualising, and implementing methodologies and pedagogies across European learning spaces.

We TRAIN to learn, to vision, to prefigure and to educate others, providing the tools to imagine, demand and enact alternatives for a viable future for Europe and beyond. At European Alternatives training and capacity building goes back to the beginnings of the organisation. We believe that education and training is at the core of transformative action and social change. The TRAIN stream envisions, conceptualizes, delivers and evaluates cross-cutting methodologies and pedagogies to build capacity for transformative change in political institutions, society, the economy and imagination. The stream creates infrastructure for long-term learning beyond the nation-state and builds in-house capacity to strengthen learning processes, deepen connections and improve agility and resilience.

Building the infrastructure for long lasting change

In times growing darker in Europe and beyond, we see a strong desire for training. Groups do not only want to acquire the skills necessary to achieve what they want, but also seek to empower themselves and others to obtain an agency of change. How can we learn to build a successful campaign, how can we facilitate and hold space in diverse groups in tension, how can we build power in our neighbourhoods with the tools of community organizing? In the TRAIN stream we equip people with the tools to learn, the places to reflect and the skills to continue their journey.

Inspirations

We are inspired by educators, pedagogues, thinkers, researchers and organizers with historical significance, as well as those working on the ground, carrying the wisdom of their communities. We are influenced by approaches of Popular Education, Community Organizing, Critical Pedagogy, Radical Adult Education, Transformative Learning



Theory as well as approaches from experimental, experience based and adventure based education. We are hoping to inspire you, the lifelong learner with new methodologies, educational institutions with cross-cutting curricula and policy makers with food for thought for connecting education and social change.

Outlook

Looking towards the year to come, we will respond to the demand for training across civil society and implement training programming to strengthen facilitation skills as part of community based and transnational assemblies, sharpen advocacy skills for migrant advocates across Europe, upskill communities on organizing capabilities and offer tailored training to partners across our networks. We are dreaming about working on deepening transversal and translocal solidarities, agile and long-term strategy approaches, dealing with multi-crisis anxiety, responding to political disillusion and the shift to the right, delivering conflict mediation and strategies to build more resilient campaigns and improve inner group dynamics. We hope to deeper integrate training across European Alternative's Stream work and support in building a network grounded in co-learning, reflection and action.

In this chapter, Jana Ahlers, EA train stream lead, continues reflections upon European Alternatives' training projects and How Training is Resurfacing as a Strategic Priority Across European Civil Society. Zeynep Karlıdağ, member of the Gorillas Workers Collectives and previous partner of EA, then provides an on-the-ground perspective on how such training can help activist movements in How We Went on Wildcat Strike and Made History. Finally, Emma Grima, activist & EA training participant, provides an alternative perspective in The Conundrum of Dreaming, Art and Activism by zooming in on artistic practice in social change & education.



How Training is Resurfacing as a Strategic Priority Across European Civil Society

Jana Ahlers

Syndicat Summit Bremen © Theater Bremen



Train to be. To be trained. Pick your side. This piece covers the history and strategic direction of European Alternative’s work in the training field. It engages with you as a curious learner and provides insights on why training is resurfacing as a strategic priority across European civil society, as well as reveal some of European Alternatives`training visions for the years to come.

When was the last time you attended a training? When was the last time you learned something new? Not simply driven by intellectual stimuli but rather a particular skill or type of behaviour that you acquired.

Training - “the action of teaching a person or animal a particular skill or type of behaviour.” Are you thinking about a dog’s playground? How exciting that by including the reference to an animal being trained in Oxford’s definition, we immediately comprehend the necessary connection between mind and body. Training, commonly understood and demoted to something practical or technical suddenly resurfaces as the intellectual and embodied art of mastery of a particular skill or behaviour. Precious.

The beginnings

At European Alternatives training and capacity building goes back to the beginnings of the organisation. Weather as part of the early campaigns, such as the Roma Rights are Human Rights Campaign in 2009, during the Transeuropa Caravans ahead of the 2014 European Parliamentary election or in preparation of the Transnational Dialogues, training is a backbone and connector across the work-streams of the organisation. In 2013 you could have attended a workshop called *Facilitating Consensus and Overcoming Barriers in Horizontal Groups* at Transeuropa Festival in London. In 2019 taken part in a course on “Countering Hate Speech” or in 2023 you might sat in a workshop called *Pour Des Alternatives Solidaires Décoloniales, Féministes et Écologiques* in Bobigny or discussed and practised how to *Ecologise Demands at the Workplace* at the Syndicat Summit in Bremen.

European Alternatives does not halt at sparking a thought, inviting a provocation or hosting an encounter, it is committed to training for change on the ground. EA organises its work by five streams (imagine, learn, assemble, act and train) to achieve the strategic objectives of the organisation. The train stream imagines, conceptualizes, delivers, experiments and evaluates the methodologies, pedagogies and curricula and seeks to live up to the principle that education and training are at the core of transformative action and social change.

“Education without social action is a one-sided value because it has no true power potential. Social action without education is a weak expression of pure energy” (Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here*, 1967).

“Training is a vehicle of trust and collective agency, a reminder of the power that we have that no-one can take from us.”

The training necessary

European Alternatives need not only to be imagined but also demanded and enacted. In the Train stream, we build and train for the attitudes, skills and behaviour required to do so. We know Europe has the resources to reinvent itself; so we get down to it. What skills or behaviours does Europe need? What skills and behaviours do you want to acquire?

At this specific moment in time, more and more organisations are inquiring about training. Irrespective of the content of the request, why is that? In an era of multi crisis, people are longing for agency, longing for avenues to pull them out of disillusion, stagnation and the assessment that, what we have done so far, clearly has not worked. Training comes in as an infrastructure that lasts, an investment of energy that will succeed even if it is in the marginal transformation of a single mind. Training is a vehicle of trust and collective agency, a reminder of the power that we have that no-one can take from us. Strategically many organisations have realised that neither big numbers, nor influential individuals are the sole key for change but returned to the basics of base building and community based organizing as a tactic that paired with other approaches promises a greater return. Every approach requires education. Education for the many. So in our attempt to support organisations to organise to win to step closer to the desired outcomes of the future we all want, we stumble upon craving for training on a variety of topics including:

“European Alternatives does not halt at sparking a thought, inviting a provocation or hosting an encounter, it is committed to training for change on the ground.”

- **Imagination:** How can we ourselves become better at imagining that another world is possible and more importantly, how do we train others to multiply imaginative processes to eventually suggest and implement them.
- **Advocacy:** How can we be more eloquent, true to ourselves, smart and effective at bringing forward our demands to decision makers.
- **Holistic Security:** How can we protect our people and communities from growing repression and prefigure ways in which security is not confining but allowing us freedom of mind.
- **Working with the Body:** How can we include mind and body in what we do to ensure that the outcomes of our learning processes last and attract different people in different ways.
- **Strategy:** How do we do what we do more effectively or how do we need to re-work our Theories of Change, Tools and Tactics in this changing environment.
- And the list goes on.

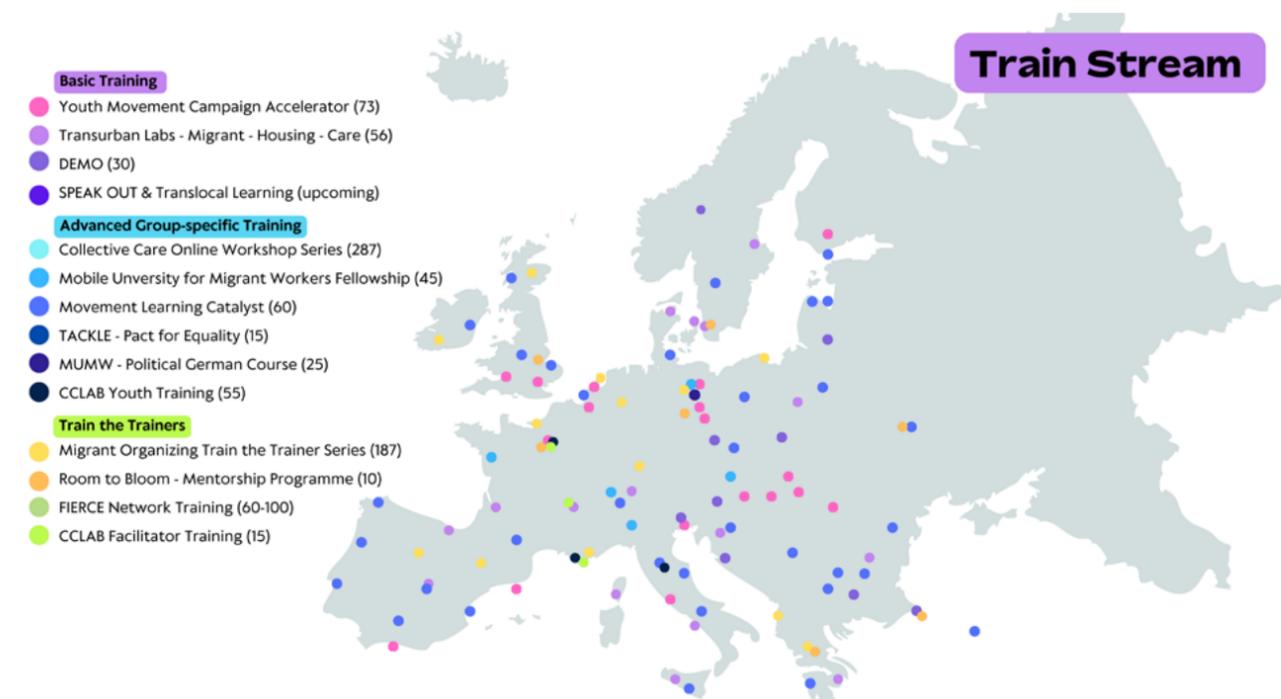
Our inspirations

At European Alternatives we listen to our participants, members, networks and partners and work closely with them to design and deliver the most suitable approaches to training possible. In our work we are inspired by educators, pedagogues, thinkers, researchers and organizers with historical significance, as well as those working on the ground, carrying the wisdom of their communities. We are inspired by Paulo Freire’s Popular Education and work closely with pedagogy developed in a Community Organizing context, by Critical Pedagogy, Radical Adult Education, Transformative Learning Theory as well as approaches from experimental, experience based and adventure based education. There is a lot to say about some of these approaches to learning and education but we will leave that for another time and end a quote which illustrates our work:

The teacher is of course an artist, but being an artist does not mean they can make the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves. (Myles Horton, 1905-1990. We make the road by walking: conversations on education and social change, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990)

From approaches to praxis, how does training actually work in practice? We have a variety of formats through which we train at EA. Training ranges from Basic Training to Advanced Group Specific Training to Train the Trainer Formats. These include accompaniment processes, long-term fellowship and residencies, as well as mentorship formats and residential training. Here is a basic overview over the scope and reach of some of the training this year and in the next section we give two showcase examples of successful training programmes of 2025.

Training Programmes 2024 ©European Alternatives



A pinch of nostalgia - two highlights if Training at EA this year

Collective Care Online Series

How can we center care as a force for political action?

If you wonder how we can attend to our personal and collective needs while still remaining active and politically engaged, you can re-watch our [Collective Care Online Series](#), starring incredible practitioners, thinkers and organizers. Sujin Noël, coach and consultant, explains how emotions propel our political claims and how our politics shape the way we appraise our emotions as well as how we can nourish the transformative potential of political emotions on the ground. Hala Alyan, clinical psychologist, professor and writer, guides us how to look after our needs and boundaries because if we aren't looking after ourselves, we cannot hold space for others. She grounds self-care in collective political struggle movement organizing, moving away from its individualist and consumerist representation. Professor emerita Joan C. Tronto and professor Deva Woodley in their session Sustaining Societies of Care re-center care as the essential relational practice that sustains the world. They explore the importance of embracing an ethics of care that does not only touch on the breadth and materiality of care, but also on the ways by which care opens up perspectives to challenge current dominant systems of interlocked injustices; to learn from the past and to envision the future. In the final session, organizer and facilitator Adilka Pimentel explores concrete examples of practices of collective care in movement contexts, centering the interconnectedness in our struggles for social justice. She dives into approaches of harm and safety and manifests care as a form of praxis that centers practices and values at the heart of our struggles.

Migrant and BIPOC Organizing Train the Trainer Series

How can we organize to win?

If you are a facilitator, mediator, trainer, community leader, caregivers or someone involved in holding space, we would have loved to have you at our recent Migrant and BIPOC Organizing Train the Trainer Series. As the world grows darker, we believe it is time to invest in carrying our knowledge of social change into and across social movements and communities. We ran the series not only to build capacity but also to deepen alliances and strengthen networks across Europe and beyond. If you had to pick a few, which parts of our modular series would you have attended: Somatics and Body Work, Community, Organizing, Repression and Holistic Security, Narrative & Messaging, Resilience & Transformative Conflict, Grief, Disability Justice and Power and Rank Dynamics. The Train the Trainer approach gives participants insights into relational, process and methodological details of a training and supports them to bring the learning back into their communities. Over 150 signed up for the series. We are likely to run a second edition in 2025, will you be in?



Berlin Summer Community Reunion ©Jamie Anderson

We make the road by walking - Outlook for 2025

Looking towards the year to come, we will respond to the demand for training across civil society and implement training programming to strengthen facilitation skills as part of community based and transnational assemblies, sharpen advocacy skills for migrant advocates across Europe, upskill communities on organizing capabilities and offered content tailored training to partners across our networks. Vision wise, think: deepening transversal and translocal solidarities, agile and long-term strategy, dealing with multi-crisis anxiety, responding to political disillusion and the shift to the right, conflict mediation and strategies to build resilient more campaigns and and improve inner group dynamics. We will offer mentoring for groups and strategy accompaniment, provide the infrastructure for encounter and peer-to-peer learning and deliver on-the-spot training that caters to the groups and needs present. We will enhance our trainers network and are excited to share a more detailed training programme that will be published in early 2025.

As we make the road by walking, we are excited to draw stronger ties between European Alternative's streams and ensure that learning and education are interwoven across the

activities of the organisation. Until then, we hope you train to be or uncover the possibilities to be trained.

"This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection" ((Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, New York: Seabury Press, 1970)

How We Went on Wildcat Strike and Made History – An Insider Retrospective about a Recent Struggle of Migrant Delivery Riders in Germany

Zeynep Karlıdağ

As defined by the Encyclopedia Britannica, a wildcat strike is a “strike action taken by workers without union authorization, in defiance of accepted union procedures.” Based on an expert opinion by Hans Carl Nipperdey, a former Nazi lawyer who later presided over the Federal Labor Court, wildcat strikes are not legal in Germany. Hereafter, work stoppages can only and exclusively be organized in connection with collective bargaining and only at the request of the unions.

A Brief History of Migrant Wildcat Strikes in Germany

Nonetheless, several wildcat strikes ornament German post-war history, each opening the door for the next one wider. One of the most famous is the Ford Strike of 1973 initiated by the so-called ‘guest workers’. Thousands of migrant Ford workers in Cologne demanded better working conditions, higher wages, and enhanced workers’ rights from the country they were rebuilding after World War II. Basically, as ‘guests’, they were demanding just a small gesture of hospitality. The strike started after a mass firing, getting media attention on the very next day – although not in a very positive way – and being seized by the police force within a week. Baha Targün, the person who initiated the strike, was exiled.

Baha Targün speaking to his co-workers at the Ford Wildcat Strike (Foto: Gernot Huber)



Among many others, another impactful wildcat strike initiated by migrant workers took place when workers of Pierburg, most of whom were women, articulated their demand for better working conditions and equal wages. The strikes faced strong opposition from the authorities, with the police often using force. However, a sense of unity emerged. Initially, on August 13, only a few workers took part in the strikes. Yet, as more workers were arrested and the management tried to intimidate them, more employees joined in. Eventually, the company had to respond. They increased everyone’s wages by 30 Pfennig. This wildcat strike not only showed the power of solidarity but also boldly confronted the prevailing sexist norms of its era.

Female migrant workers at the Pierburg Strike (Foto: DOMID-Archiv)



Time Loop Tangles: From Guest Worker to Wildcat Strikes in the Gig Economy

Almost fifty years after the decade of wildcat strikes against exploitation and racist labour practices in Germany, there is a new generation of precarious workers, I am part of. In 2021, during the Corona pandemic, when I started to work at Gorillas, a Berlin-based grocery delivery startup, in the first two weeks I was super happy as a part-time delivery rider. Because I was making more than what I would make as a full-time teacher at a prestigious school in my hometown in Turkey. But quickly my first impression changed. Many of us have come to avoid the oppression in our home countries. Every rider in this company has their studies but they cannot find proper jobs because they don't know German or their diplomas aren't recognized. In the gig economy, this precarity is being turned into a profitable business model.

Let me quote just a few of my colleagues and the experiences they made:

- “We have six orders in one backpack, and that happens over and over again. Sometimes you can't even close the 'rucksack' because it's overloaded, and you still have to deliver everything. I have no idea how heavy the backpack is sometimes, maybe 40 kilos. You can hardly get it on your back. And that's what it's like for the whole shift for 8 hours.”
- “In some of the warehouses, people experienced sexual harassment and racial discrimination, and we cannot openly get against them because most of us are on probation, which means that we can get fired without a reason.”
- “Very often, workers ride their bicycles and, for example, the seat falls off or something breaks, which leads to accidents. Accidents are very common at this company. That also has to do with the company's business model, which promises to deliver within 10 minutes. There have been very serious accidents – people with broken limbs, people who needed surgery. There was even a rider who almost died.”

Often those that were the most vulnerable or did not know their rights were the ones that were taken advantage of the most. At Gorillas, we as workers took a stand against these precarious working conditions in several ways, the most outstanding one being a chain of wildcat strikes we orchestrated. Let's have a closer look at this case, because although the problems of Gorillas workers were similar to those of our strike-wise grandparents, the wave of strikes, blockades and protests lasted for months and there was luckily no police violence involved. But why do we say that the problems show similarity to those of fifty years ago, and although there was a decade of strikes, why does Germany still continue to fail its migrant workers after fifty years?

“In Germany, there is a system where both works' councils and trade unions play a role in influencing labour policies. In theory, all workers, regardless of where they come from, have the right to join either of these groups for representation. However, in reality, not all workers can



A demonstration organized by the Gorillas Workers Collective (Photo: Franziska Rau)

A demonstration organized by the Gorillas Workers Collective (Photo: Franziska Rau)

go on strike or even get their concerns heard by works' councils and trade unions. The problem is that there are old laws still in place designed to regulate guest workers, which restrict workers' ability to move around and get involved in workplace democracy and politics. That's why the same tale from fifty years ago is retold today, but thanks to the struggles of the wildcat strike pioneers of the guestworker generation and the existence of modern social media, this tale has been adapted to these times.”

Here is a brief retrospective of what happened when we realized that the Gorillas business model cannot work without us and how we as workers went on strike, kept the momentum for months, and are still on the way to changing regulations in Germany.

A group of workers, what we later called the 'Gorillas Workers Collective' (GWC), was formed, inspired by a group of workers refusing to work in subzero temperatures, thus leading to a week-long shutdown across all warehouses at Gorillas in February 2021. We were already trying to inform other colleagues about their legal rights, by organizing social gatherings, writing articles, and translating those information. When a co-worker publicly shared information about worker's rights, it led to their dismissal without a warning because the worker was on probation. However, the company made a mistake in the termination letter. The worker had two options, they were either going to accept the dismissal or object to the mistake. In case the company received the objection, the

took months due to bureaucratic reasons – many workers gathered in front of the warehouse where the fired worker worked, and decided to blockade the warehouse. That moment marked the birth of a chain of wildcat strikes and creative actions such as the “Always Be Striking Tour” or the “Noise Demo.” At the end of a year full of strikes and demonstrations, Gorillas workers managed to get some of their demands met, such as being provided with winter jackets, and formed a works' council, inspiring other delivery workers not only in Germany but also in other European countries to fight for what is already their right and what may be their rights in the future.”

Unraveling from Time Loop Tangles: Fighting Business-as-usual and German Strike Law

Just like our strike-wise grandparents, we as Gorillas workers also faced many challenges such as lack of support from unions and dealing with union busting tactics from the company, as well as other forms of repression. For instance, workers got calls from private numbers and were asked, 'Did you participate in the strikes?', and if they said 'Yes' they were fired. However, at the end of our fight, Gorillas workers neither faced police force nor were any of them exiled. I personally relate this success to the power of social media and how Gorillas workers used social media tactics to show what is going on behind the “cool” curtains of Gorillas, in addition to the pioneering inspiration and efforts of our strike-wise grandparents.

“I remember the very first wildcat strike and how the warehouse-level managers were talking about the 'non-sense' the protesting workers were doing until they saw people filming the strike and then immediately started being 'supportive' of the actions. Gorillas workers were using channels such as Twitter and Instagram very actively. While there were more informative posts on Twitter about the working conditions and updates from the strikes and protests, the posts on Instagram were using humour to make workers' voices heard. In a nutshell, Gorillas workers were visible with thousands of followers.”

Three Gorillas workers who were kicked out due to wildcat strikes in the October 2021 mass firing tried to sue Gorillas in April 2022 and 2023, however, the trials confirmed their dismissals and upheld the illegality of wildcat strikes in Germany. Gorillas has since withdrawn from Europe, but the gig economy still proves a strong risk to workers rights. We must continue working to abolish 'legalized modern slavery' that is inherited from Hans Carl Nipperday shaping labor court decisions in Germany, hindering the right to strike and conflicting with international law.

company would correct the mistake in a few days and the worker would be dismissed again. Thus, whatever was to be done, had to be done in those few days. This led to Gorillas workers' deciding to initiate a workers' council process as a strategy to protect their colleague from this legal and moral scandal and to strengthen the organizing drive we were articulating.

“According to German labour law, if a worker is part of a works' council process by being an inviter, electoral council member, or workers' council member, they are automatically out of probation, meaning that they enjoy special protection. The dismissed worker became one of the initiators of the process and thus couldn't be fired without a warning.”

In the case of Gorillas workers, forming a works' council was not a problem language-wise, differently from fifty years ago. However, a works' council, contrary to what many politicians and union representatives say, did not solve the ongoing problems as Gorillas refused to cooperate. Nonetheless, the GWC became popular among our colleagues as this formation revealed the problems at Gorillas, and the platform economy in general, by reminding workers that a dedicated group of workers is committed to actively contribute to address the company's failures.

“Later on, when another worker got fired while on probation – during the works' council preparations which

The

Conundrum of Dreaming,

Art and

Activism

Emma Grima

The Youth Movement & Campaign Accelerator was an EA project running from November 2023 until April 2024 which offered European youth and community leaders a way to engage in, and build, European democracy, by establishing a transnational network able to connect national and local issues to EU-level policymaking.

The project aimed to increase the engagement of young people and their communities in constructing European democracy by the creation of a network of young people living in Europe. These young people participated in trainings to help them activate their local communities and to articulate their issues and demands, testing out ways to take collective action in their communities.

This tight-knit network of engaged young European citizens and organizations have worked as a link between institutions and their citizens and especially frontline communities.

In this article by Emma Grima we present the experience of one of the participants of the first cohort of YMCA programme.

'We are a bunch of dreamers us artists', a good friend told me over a phone call last week. Hearing this made me cringe, as somehow, being a dreamer doesn't sit quite right with me. The concept of dreaming was a topic of conversation that week, which kept coming back. One was an encounter with a philosopher, who pointed out that my practice sounded like a heterotopia. This term refers to the in-between of a utopia, a partially tangible social dream physically represented in this world. This concept did sit better with me, thank-you Foucault for that. This made me reflect on how I search for ways to make the ungraspable graspable, through my artistic practice. Sure, we are dreamers, but hopeful ones I would say, as hope usually arises when we see action in play.

Artistic individuals have one thing in common, creating a personal methodology. This is a bottom-up working approach, a method in which one carves out a unique journey

to get from A to B, which so happens to be a successful approach to changing old systems. Now I'm not saying all artists have socially engaged practices, but there is a large creative movement around societal issues that instigates impact and change.

I would like to introduce you to a few inspirational artists part of this movement having an active role in society, art and politics. How they go about visual storytelling has impacted many on micro and macro levels.

Laia Abril is a research-based artist working on long-term projects. Her most known work is 'A History Of Misogyny' split up into chapters on rape, abortion, mass hysteria, menstruation and femicide. She gathers, records, researches, and photographs, turning this into exhibition installations and publications. Her work is educational and has been successful in getting people to listen, lending a platform for the voiceless on a global scale.

During an interview, Abril stated that she does not wish to be called an activist as her act of creating comes from more personal curiosity, but she then manages to create quite a communal impact. This makes me question why artists are so obsessed with finding that perfect label that best molds their work.

Then we have Nan Goldin, a ground-breaking artist who has shifted her practice towards activism over the years. Having gained a profound voice as an artist she has used this to her benefit, channelling this platform into activism. In 2022 she released a film documentary called 'All The Beauty And The Bloodshed', about her life story as a photographer, intertwining it with her current work as an activist with P.A.I.N. A group that is fighting for justice against the pharmaceutical industry making money off the opioid crisis. She successfully targeted the Sackler family through civil disobedience, making large museums such as The Louvre and The Met pull out of multi-million funding deals with their blood money.

Photography was the tool that gave Nan a voice, wanting to eternalise a history that was slipping rapidly away. She documents her life and circle of Queer friends in the 70s and 80s to the present day, capturing the rawness and tenderness of human life without passing judgement. Through her work, we have seen two sides of the coin - joy, desire, love, and a more destructive one - what drugs and sex did to her friends during the AIDS pandemic in New York. Artists like Nan have shown how art can impact many and inspire social change.

I cannot leave out Carrie Mae Weems's unique way of storytelling. She creates extravagant immersive installations

and multimedia performances depicting several layered stories of silenced, ignored, historical, racial and identity-driven works. One of Weems' most renowned works is her timeless project, 'The Kitchen Table Series', 1990. This is a series of 20 black

and white medium format images of Carrie Mae herself sitting at the table. One can observe different daily activities that could happen around the kitchen table. In every act, Weems is there, alone or with others. It is a self-portrait that shows the passing of time and portrays her role as a woman in society. This simple setting amplifies the larger picture. It is relatable to the masses and universal. This is why it hits home to many, which is not an easy accomplishment. That gaze she locks in with the viewers, the story she tells through these images, speaks mountains.



Kitchen Table - 1990, By Carrie Mae Weems

These are the living women I relate to and look up to as a female artist and activist. My artistic practice subconsciously awoke the activist in me, bringing me into this social movement towards advocating for change and excavating insidious power. I awoke deeply seated emotions, and unmetabolized pain, which awoke a wave of anger. Audre Lorde an intersectional feminist, writer and philosopher explains this awakening so perfectly by distinguishing between the feeling of pain and suffering.

Suffering is the nightmare, the reliving of unmetabolized and unrecognised pain. Pain is an event, an experience that must be recognised, a force that can catalyse change, (force) knowledge or fuel action. We have been taught to endure suffering, to suppress our longings, and to silence ourselves. Understanding your pain can fuel change. In my case, I have used this pain to liberate our rights to body autonomy and agency.

Through my artistic practice, I have been decolonising the female mind due to my Maltese upbringing embedded in trans-generational trauma. I continuously aim to destigmatize, depatriarchalize, and decolonize intersectional bodies towards autonomy. I have been addressing topics central to the theme of sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) working on socio-political long-term projects. On Abortion, Sexual Pleasure, HIV and Post-Porn tapping into social constructs, posthuman and intersectional feminism.

My latest is a collaboration with Checkpoint Malta intertwining a campaign and activism. 'We Are Positive', 2024, asks everyone in Malta to 'walk in the shoes' of people living with HIV (PLHIV) to humanise and build a PLHIV community. Our first action was an interactive art installation wrapping Malta's LOVE Monument in St. Julian's with 620 HIV self-testing kit boxes to highlight the human element of those living with HIV, the stigma that is still tied to living with the virus, and the importance of regular HIV and sexual health screening. The general public was encouraged to engage with the art installation, by taking off a box to start a conversation and increasing access to information about why everyone should know their status; how and where to get tested and normalising testing to reduce stigma.

My passion and love for artistic creativity has always come first. The act of creative making for me has compensated for not knowing how to change a situation that sometimes feels hopeless. My artistic career has taught me to take a

hands-on approach in working with communities and individuals who do care, however, the system in power manipulates its way through corruption, greed, and capital, shutting us out which is so demotivating.

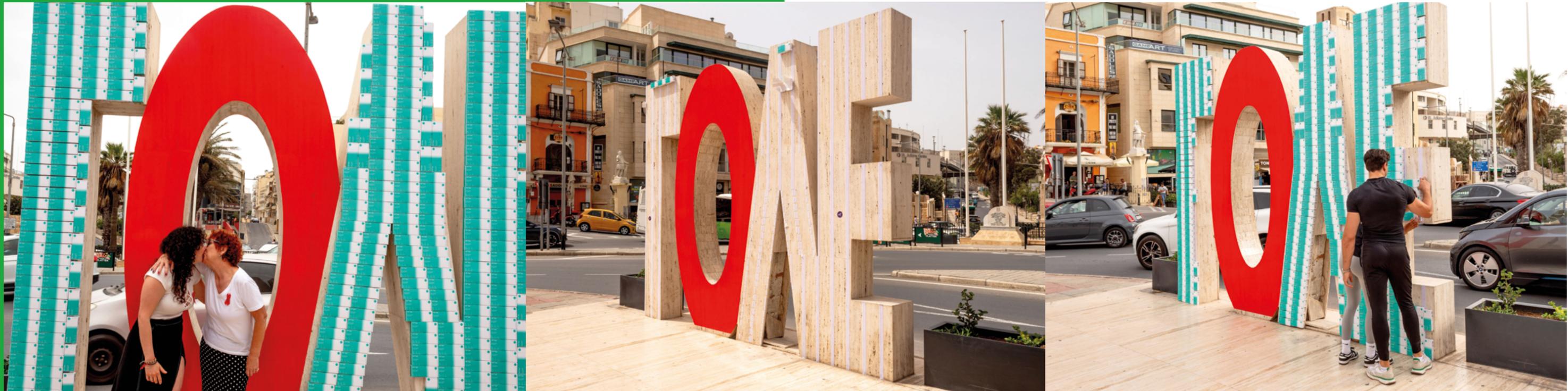
I keep on coming back to my homeland Malta and all I can think of is shouting out 'shame on you' for not listening to us, for ignoring our basic human rights and insidiously controlling the masses.

Our Sexual health policies in Malta have not changed in 14 years which reflects the way our citizens are treated. I feel silenced by the lack of progress. Why are we the last EU country with the strictest anti-abortion laws in 2024 having a complete blanket ban, and the highest rates of HIV and syphilis in the EU/EEA due to our poor sexual health policy, leaving the GU clinic in despair with waiting lists of over 6 months?

Working on activist projects in Malta has opened my eyes to the current despair and tiredness of Maltese activists and NGOs, which saddens me. The lack of enthusiasm and communal efforts are rising in a sea of people choosing not to care.

At times I feel torn between the artist and activist, wishing to create for creating sake but having the drive to educate and impact. Perhaps, I am a stubborn dreamer, who wishes for a heterotopic future and probably will not choose one over the other.

And here I go again, igniting some big ideas that involve a lot of large-scale collaboration between countries, as opposed to remaining Malta-specific. To give you a graspable picture, I am inspired by the creative methods easily replicated for others to do by the Chilean feminist collective Las Tesis who created a street performance 'The rapist is you!' which became an international phenomenon unifying many countries. Perhaps Carrie Mae Weems's kitchen series also has a similar effect to this feminist group's way of intriguing many. So I somewhat draw my conclusion and leave you with this. Relatability and simplicity are key, known to spread like wildfire, creating tractions larger than the powers that try to silence us all.



© Are Positive – 2024, By Emma Grima in Collaboration with Checkpoint Malta

A

by Ophélie Masson

In a political context where representative democracy is losing its power and ability to inspire trust, and consequently its appeal to a population seeking new modes of action and expression, it is more relevant—and even more urgent than ever—for civil society to propose new forms of citizen* participation aligned with our contemporary needs. At European Alternatives, we believe in the transformative potential of citizen assemblies—spaces where individuals come together to discuss their pressing issues, share ideas, and collaboratively develop solutions. These assemblies embody the principles of participatory democracy, offering a platform where everyone, regardless of citizenship status, can contribute to shaping a better future.

S

Citizen assemblies are more than mere discussions; they are dynamic forums for dialogue and decision-making. Unlike traditional representative democracy, which often marginalises non-citizens and underrepresented voices, these assemblies prioritise inclusivity and grassroots engagement. Participants are encouraged to address issues that directly impact their communities, from local governance to broader societal and political challenges. By fostering open and equitable participation, citizen assemblies strengthen communities, increase political engagement, and amplify diverse perspectives in policy making.

M

At their core, these assemblies are experiments in transformative action. They challenge entrenched political structures, inspire societal change, and nurture new ways of thinking about democracy. By advancing and defending fundamental civic, democratic, and social rights, we aim to contribute to the creation of a society that is not only more just and inclusive but also more imaginative.

The choice of location for citizen assemblies is as symbolic as their purpose. Assemblies reclaim spaces—both political and geographical—to re-empower communities. Educational spaces, such as universities, are particularly significant venues, as they integrate participatory democracy into lifelong learning and transform traditionally exclusionary institutions into hubs of inclusion and dialogue. Public spaces, including parks, squares, cultural centers, and artistic venues, are also vital. These settings ensure that assemblies remain visible and accessible to the broader public, reinforcing the idea that public spaces belong to everyone.

L

The success of an assembly depends on the diversity of its participants. These gatherings bring together local activists who are deeply knowledgeable about specific community issues, as well as European-level activists who offer transnational perspectives and insights from other regions. Crucially, assemblies also seek to involve members of the silent majority—those who are aware of the challenges their communities face but have not yet engaged in organized efforts to address them. This inclusive approach ensures that assemblies reflect the full spectrum of community experiences and ideas.

S

Our assemblies are guided by a set of core values that drive meaningful and lasting change. Each gathering focuses on locally relevant issues while adopting a transnational perspective that allows communities to learn from successful initiatives beyond their borders. From Constanta, Romania and the Black Sea coast all the way to the Irish coast, a similar issue arises: the need for a proper and cohesive strategy to protect local communities and the biodiversity - on land and under waters - as mass tourism allows for the local economic development but at the peril of nature. Only a translocal approach could identify this joint struggle (through diverse local assemblies) and formulate some common mitigation proposals (recommendations made in a transnational assembly).

E

Creativity and experimentation play a central role, with arts and culture serving as powerful tools to unlock new possibilities and imagine alternative futures. Assemblies are also anti-Eurocentric, embracing global collaboration to develop fresh, inclusive solutions. By empowering participants and fostering active engagement, these events create spaces for co-creation and collaboration, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued.

Through these efforts, citizen assemblies connect local realities with global contexts, enabling communities to envision a future that transcends national boundaries. They articulate a radical, long-term vision of democratic, just, and culturally open politics and society—one that is grounded in local action but enriched by global solidarity.

B

At European Alternatives, our Assemble stream is dedicated to creating spaces where every voice matters. By fostering inclusive dialogue, embracing diverse perspectives, and ensuring meaningful follow-up through advocacy, we empower communities to take charge of their destinies. Together, we can build a world where assemblies are not just gatherings but catalysts for a shared and equitable future.

* The word citizen in this article should be understood as encompassing realities of not just people holding EU citizenship, but all people residing in the EU, including non-EU ones and stateless.

E

In this chapter, Myriam Zekagh, EA project coordinator, opens by discussing the importance of experimentation, connection & assembling to dream & enact another Europe in *Creating a Common Space for Alternatives*. Irene Alonso Toucido, EA project manager, then in *Embarking on a Democratic Odyssey* invites us to join a journey of transforming democracy, and Csenge Lonhart, EA project manager, describes the process of *Creating a citizen assembly* in conversation with The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union.

Creating a Common Space for Alternatives

Myriam Zekagh

European Common Space for Alternatives (ECSA) event in Marseille



The dilemmas of our time - climate change, austerity, refugee crises, patriarchy - are transnational in nature. Answering them requires a coordinated effort from unions, civil society organisations, informal collectives, individuals committed to social justice - even political parties. The European Common Space for Alternatives (ECSA) aims to do just that: bring together all forces working for an alternative to the neoliberal order as we know it, and build bridges across countries, struggles, for a lived experience of trust and solidarity.

Marseille, Sunday 28 april, 9 am. Despite the beautiful spring morning on the sea side, hundreds of activists are huddled together in a dark amphitheatre for a final assembly, bringing to a close three days of solidarity in action.

Summarizing discussions that took place over three days is no easy task; neither is the attempt to bridge local struggles, and share them into a common narrative, to which any European resident can connect, regardless of gender, class or ethnic background. International solidarity is not new, but has been rather disjointed lately: climate crisis and social justice are now part of a common understanding; it is less obvious when trying to make explicit the link between current wars and the welfare of our planet. This link is however evident, when considering the environmental impact of the thousands of bombs sent in Ukraine & Gaza, or when highlighting that democratic deficit is a common denominator

Be it water management, social security, public services: for residents of Europe, the most direct threats to humanity's livelihood are transnational in nature. Nationalism be damned, no country will face the climate crisis or influx of environmental refugees on their own - and those who say so are not being truthful or are unaware of the social dynamics at play. In fact, even the far right knows it, and operates through transnational networks: they share intel, information, have the same funding sources and seek support from the same allies among the most conservative global leaders¹. Year after year, far right parties gain ground, strengthen their influence and seize more seats of power - and the funding that goes with it, even if it takes twisting the rules². Even in the European parliament, sovereignists and patriots are gaining seats, becoming more structured, increasing their funding, network and knowledge of public affairs.

In this context, time is of the essence. To keep a clear mind, we shouldn't give in to the frenzy induced by the urgency to fix our climate and our democracy; but we must remember that if the best time to fix things was years ago, the next best time is now. And if not now, when?

1. "Le RN est aligné sur la Russie, selon un rapport parlementaire"; Euractiv, 2 June 2023, URL: <https://www.euractiv.fr/section/institutions/news/le-rassemblement-national-est-aligne-sur-la-russie-selon-un-rapport-parlementaire/>
2. "French far-right leader Marine Le Pen to stand trial over alleged misuse of EU funds"; Reuters, 8 December 2023, URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/french-far-right-leader-marine-le-pen-stand-trial-over-alleged-misuse-eu-funds-2023-12-08/>

Concretely, this means creating or solidifying this European network of like-minded people, those behind social movements who know that mobilisation and solidarity building are at the core of any change-making action. What this network could and should do includes:

- Building mutual trust and understanding, a prerequisite for any form of collaboration
- Share relevant information and identify common strategic opportunities
- Pursue these opportunities, in coalitions or independently but in a somewhat coordinated fashion

In short, give the clear feeling that there is a common “We” for this alternative Europe, that this “We” takes the form of a widespread network of actors - all of which are contributing to the same goal. This entails a form of union (an end to all-to-frequent leftist squabbling), solidified through risk-taking. How much skin each of us are ready to put in this game, is entirely dependent on how relevant we think the European level is.

That relevance is what the European Common Space for Alternatives (ECSA) event in Marseille aimed to showcase. Over 600 activists from more than 100 organisations and 20 countries, gathered for three days to meet, exchange perspectives and striving for convergence and connections on key issues: war, climate, emancipation & solidarity, repression of civic forces, to mention a few.

The city of Marseille wasn't a random choice either: after decades of abandonment by public authorities the city has become an example of self-organised space where grassroots work is pivotal to the availability of public services for most citizens, not only the most precarious. It is thanks to local organisations that this ECSA event could be certain to not fly off to the stratosphere of ideas but answer very concretely: “how will this effectively change people's lives?”, and overcome the challenge of making the European scale relevant to local action.

This event was the culminating point of an eight month long online process of convergence, and a fluid organisational structure, with at its center an open structure where political challenges are addressed: what framing? How to guarantee inclusivity, and overcome language issues? What can we achieve collectively in a context of resource scarcity and increased repression? This process is not without challenges:

1. Different activist cultures, showcasing how different practical expectations and approaches can be to solve the same problems
2. Path dependency: The shadow of the European Social Forum, an experiment from the Iraq war times and most definitely anchored in the pre-2008-crisis world, aligned with the World Social Forum, lurked at every corner, as a common frame of reference. The challenge here was precisely to create a new frame of reference.

3. Expanding the circle to other stakeholders than the usual suspects and actors involved in international matters. To solve this, ECSA has been open to any and all organisations & individuals³ interested and active in European-level solidarity.
4. Time, finally: even in the best conditions, trust is built one action at a time. Historic examples of international brigades remind us what extreme forms this commitment can take, beyond the online zoom rooms and remote conversations.

This gathering was a first experience, and will continue in other forms. Lessons were drawn, expectations clarified in this space under construction, which anyone can contribute to. Giving life to this transnational idea is in any case a long-term affair, as shown by the decades invested - by EA, among others. Another transnational solidarity platform has been kicked off. Now what?

Several leads: another event to work towards, around 2026, and until then a continued presence of members of the ECSA network in all of the political spaces that see a relevance to weaving european-level solidarities: from Fête de l'Humanité, France's largest celebration fo progressive parties and organisations, to EA's Transeuropa festival, where art, politics and societal issues intersect to imagine and share a common horizon of what another Europe can look like. Transform! Europe's Future Factory⁶ is another of ECSA's harbours: this year's edition will present how political utopias can be built through citizen participation and emancipation.

Taking a step back, we can already envision that building a transnational space for alternatives will require each of us, believers in another horizon for Europe, to make more attempts at connecting, learning, planning & launching coordinated attacks on the status quo. It will also take more experimentation, to solve the less evident issues: bringing more local groups to international coordination, and more international actors in local fights. In short, how to activate this synapse between lived experience and supranational action.

Beyond strategy, it will require all of the bravery we can muster - to leave the comfort zone of like-minded progressives and europhiles, to explore new social circles, where we will find other kindred spirits, operating at another level, but toward the same goal and with the same determination. Because it takes courage to defend a world that hasn't happened yet, and is already threatened by regressive forces. It takes courage to dream, and enact, this other Europe.

5. Interested? Reach out to ecsa2024@proton.me
4. <https://fete.humanite.fr/>
5. <https://transeuropafestival.eu/>
6. <https://future-factory.org/>

Embarking on a Democratic Odyssey: Shaping the Future of Europe Together

Irene Alonso Toucido

The Democratic Odyssey





Image taken during the first day of deliberation in the Athens Citizen Assembly

What is an Odyssey?

An odyssey is more than just a journey—it’s a transformative quest filled with challenges, discoveries, and moments of profound growth. Originating from Homer’s epic tale of Odysseus navigating his way back to Ithaca, the term encapsulates perseverance, adaptability, and the pursuit of a destination worth striving for. In our modern context, an odyssey represents the collective journey of humanity as we seek to address pressing challenges and create a better future.

But what if we turned “odyssey” into a verb? To “odyssey” might mean to explore uncharted paths, embrace the unknown, and reimagine the way we connect and solve problems. At the same time, we must re-appropriate the concept of the odyssey itself. Homer’s tale, as foundational as it is, reflects a patriarchal worldview that centers on dominance, conquest, and one man’s heroic perspective. Today, to “odyssey” must mean something more inclusive—a journey defined not by individual triumph but by collective exploration, equity, and shared growth. By reclaiming the term, we transform it into a metaphor for collaboration and the pursuit of justice, ensuring it reflects the values of equality and diversity we strive for.



The Athens Citizen Assembly

Why is Democracy in Odyssey?

If democracy could “odyssey,” it would signify its ongoing evolution. Democracies worldwide are facing unprecedented challenges: polarizing politics, environmental crises, economic inequities, and the erosion of public trust. Yet, this is not the end of democracy—it is a call to action, an invitation to journey together toward renewal.

Democracy in odyssey means striving to rediscover its core values: participation, fairness, and inclusion. It means embracing new tools and methods that empower citizens to actively shape decisions that affect their lives. Just as an odyssey demands perseverance and adaptability, so too must democracy evolve, guided by the principle that every voice matters and that our collective journey is stronger when it reflects the diversity and interconnectedness of all its participants.

What Does the Democratic Odyssey Bring?

The Democratic Odyssey is a crowdsourced, decentralized, and collaborative campaign dedicated to developing a concept and strategy for institutionalizing a permanent people’s assembly and a participatory ecosystem within the European Union. Inspired by the ancient Greek assemblies where (so-called) citizens deliberated, decided, and held power collec-

tively, this modern initiative reimagines that model for the 21st century.

At its core, the Democratic Odyssey is about breaking down hierarchies and fostering a space where participation is equal and accessible to all. It seeks to harness the collective intelligence of diverse groups, empowering citizens to co-create solutions to shared challenges. While addressing global crises, the initiative remains deeply rooted in local realities, ensuring that transnational issues are tackled with sensitivity to regional needs.

A central pillar of the Odyssey is its commitment to inclusion, amplifying the voices of those who have historically been left out of decision-making processes. It is also a space for exploration, where innovative practices and creative approaches are embraced, even in the face of uncertainty. Through this process, the project builds a shared sense of purpose and enables citizens to take ownership of the democratic future they wish to see.

By blending these elements, the Democratic Odyssey lays the groundwork for a new model of democracy—one that is participatory, resilient, and responsive to the needs of all.

What Has Happened So Far?

The Democratic Odyssey began with a clear mission: to bring people together across borders and create a space for collective deliberation. The first assembly was held in Athens, the birthplace of democracy, where participants explored their collective experiences of different crisis. Citizens, civil society organizations, and observers came together to tackle the question:

What needs to change for Europe to weather future storms? And how can we, the people, help better steer the ship?

The Athens Assembly combined dialogue, artistic expression, and collaborative problem-solving to produce a shared vision of Europe's potential. This gathering marked the first step in building a framework for transnational deliberation, setting the stage for the future of the travelling assembly.

What Comes Next?

The journey continues as we chart a path toward the Florence Assembly, to be held from February 21st to 23rd, 2025. Building on the rich discussions and reflections from Athens, participants are invited to carry forward their ideas, weaving connections into a stronger fabric of collective purpose to start shaping the recommendations that will be finalised in Vienna.

In the recent online gathering on November 26th, participants revisited the outcomes of Athens, laying the groundwork for what lies ahead. This virtual encounter reaffirmed the principles of inclusion, shared intelligence, and democratic exploration that anchor this project.

Future assemblies will delve deeper into Europe's most pressing questions, with Florence and Vienna as the next stops in this journey.

Step by step, we move closer to a vision of democracy that transcends borders—a People's Assembly for Europe that is participatory, inclusive, and responsive to the challenges of our time.

Creating a citizen assembly, an interview with TASZ

Csenge Schneider-Lonhart

The Festiboat stage at Lille Fluctuations Festival © Christine Garand



In the summer of 2024, a special floating festival took place in Europe. Fluctuations is Europe’s first multistop river festival that combines culture, democracy, and ecology to write purposeful and hopeful narratives along the continent’s waterways, navigated by a riverboat serving as both an artistic stage and an artist residence. At each stop, it unfolds a kaleidoscopic festival, featuring concerts & DJ sets, citizen assemblies, participatory workshops, a sustainable food court, and a village bringing together ecological vendors, NGOs, and impact companies. This year, the festival traveled through three cities by boat: Lille, Brussels, and Utrecht.

This prototype event laid the groundwork for a sustainable transnational festival, connecting regions through an alternative geographical approach—not by national borders, but along the shared path of a river.

In the fourth city, Budapest, the festival had to be relocated, topically due to the decade’s flood. Fluctuations was hosted at Turbine Cultural Center, where a collaboration between European Alternatives and TASZ (The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union) to create a citizens assembly took place, themed to participants’ desires on the usage of the river in Budapest, the Danube.



The Assembly at Fluctuations Festival Budapest © János Alina

Could you tell us a bit about TASZ and what you do?

Nóri We’re a human rights advocacy organization, and our main goal is to ensure that everyone knows their fundamental rights and can use the tools the law provides. You could call it classic empowerment. We help citizens navigate the maze of state bureaucracy, in many cases, we help people stand up against state oppression.

to see what legal options they have. Often, these are problems that don’t even require legal intervention—they could just be discussed. It’s difficult to navigate because people don’t know if their fear of retaliation is justified or if it’s just the prevailing atmosphere making them think they’ll get into trouble.

What are the biggest challenges for you in the current political context?

Lilla One of the biggest challenges—and I think this reflects the current political situation—is that people often don’t know where to turn for information. One of TASZ’s main functions is our free legal aid service. It’s not just cases of severe, obvious rights violations that come to us; people are so starved for information that they don’t know where to go for help. No one guides them, so they’re thrilled when a search on the internet leads them to us, and we can give them a clear, well-developed answer.

Léna What Lilla said reminded me of a conversation we had with one of our colleagues. The primary goal of our organization is to protect fundamental rights, and our activities are built around that. However, many people contact us with basic employment or social security questions, or about how to access childcare benefits. Our informational materials increasingly cover these topics because, as Lilla mentioned, people can’t find this information, and the state doesn’t provide a platform for it. As a result, our organization takes on a more practical role, offering information and help on everyday issues. Many people don’t have their basic needs met, so concerns about dignity or freedom of expression come later. Of course, many people do contact us about those issues, but it’s clear that society has left people to fend for themselves.

Another challenge reflecting Hungary’s political climate is fear. Many people are too afraid to ask their superiors even simple employment law questions, which in other environments wouldn’t be a problem, so they turn to a legal aid service instead

What strategies could be developed for authorities to make people more informed about their rights? Why doesn’t the state currently have such a strategy?

Nóra That's a great question, and one we'd like an answer to as well. The general excuse we hear is a lack of capacity. Authorities claim they have too much to do already, even basic tasks. For example, environmental monitoring or thoroughly checking environmental conditions when issuing permits often doesn't happen because they lack the resources.

It's not sustainable for civil organizations to fill in for the state. Yet, in Hungary today, that's what happens—not just with us, but many civil organizations take on state functions.

Léna I'd add that there doesn't seem to be any awareness that state tools need to be made accessible to citizens. The mentality appears to be missing. State websites are outdated, and poor user experience and interface design make it hard for citizens to use them. It's not just about having the information but also how it's presented. There's very little effort from the state to make this information truly accessible.

Lilla There's a mindset problem on both sides. Citizens rarely expect a partnership with state institutions, though that's often what's needed. For a functioning democracy, people need to know they're not shouting into a void—that someone is listening. Contacting legal aid is often a huge step. Many people operate at such a basic level because they lack essential resources, so it doesn't occur to them that their fundamental rights might be violated. There's no demand for these rights because they don't know they have them or how to assert them. There's a huge gap on the state side, but also a lack of empowerment among citizens, which could be addressed through state incentives or education.

I'd like to shift now to what you did at the Fluctuations festival. How did you get involved with it, and how did you find the format of a Citizen Assembly?

Nóra I was initially quite intimidated. Our organization hadn't done anything like this before. We reviewed the materials; thematic guides, manifestos, and the Assembly example from Transylvania you shared, Csenge, about a previous assembly organized by the European Alternatives. That sparked our interest, and we felt better prepared. We wanted people's voices to be heard, so we invited municipal representatives and experts, creating a space for citizens to share their ideas.

Léna It was amazing to see how eager people were to get involved—and they did. The format worked really well. It was such a refreshing contrast to the usual apathy often seen in Hungarian society. In these settings, that apathy seems to vanish completely. I don't even think about it during events like music festivals. These examples show that people are willing and ready to engage.

Could you describe the topic of the assembly and the ideas that emerged? Also, what will happen with the collected ideas?

Nóri The Danube seemed like a natural choice, especially since the event was initially planned to be held on the riverside, putting us in physical proximity to it. Even though we ended up a bit further from the river, participants still engaged deeply with the topic.

It felt like a big dream to involve municipal representatives and experts, but it came true. Participants generated excellent ideas, and the experts validated them. Miki from Valyo1 provided insights about what had already been tried and what was new, while Péter2 offered reality checks on the feasibility of ideas. It was impactful for participants to see a decision-maker genuinely listening to them. Everyone understood that the ideas would be forwarded to the municipality, and Péter would help ensure they were taken seriously. It felt incredibly democratic, and we need more of this. This format truly convinced me.

Which idea was your favorite?

Nóra I loved the concept of swimming along the river and imagining it happening right in front of the Parliament. It was wonderful to see such creative thinking.

1. Miklós Tömör from Valyo, the City and River Association. Valyo aims to encourage people to use the Danube and its banks. They envision the city as a connecting point to water and nature, where residents would feel ownership over both the city and the river. As an association, they set an example for sustainable and ethical use of the Danube riverbanks through active community engagement, actions, interventions, community-building, and education.

2. The second expert was Péter Tamás Szaló, a local government advisor responsible for smart cities and participatory governance. He was invited to listen to the participants' views.



Lilla I found the “liquid public space” concept fascinating. I'd love to attend an open-air cinema on the water, relaxing by the river. I connected deeply when Miki mentioned that public spaces are underutilized and thus fall out of focus. The idea of reclaiming these spaces for the people who rightfully own them resonated with me. It's a compelling initiative.

Léna Each idea was exciting, especially because they were so diverse. Beyond recreation and relaxation, I was intrigued by the proposal to use the river for a new form of transportation. One participant mentioned living by the Danube and envisioned commuting by kayak or canoe. The idea of a communal kayak-sharing system, similar to the bike-sharing program, was really interesting. Imagine people, not just large boats or water buses, navigating the river. It's a novel way to bring people closer to the water.

The ideas generated during the citizen assembly in Budapest were compiled into a manifesto and sent to the local authorities, with the aim of making them a reality. By engaging with local experts and decision-makers, the participants' voices were heard, and their creative solutions have the potential to transform Budapest's relationship with the Danube. It is our hope that these ideas will inspire future projects and contribute to a more inclusive, sustainable urban landscape.



by Myriam Zekagh

Bridging Activism and Decision-Making: The ACT Stream's Mission for Change

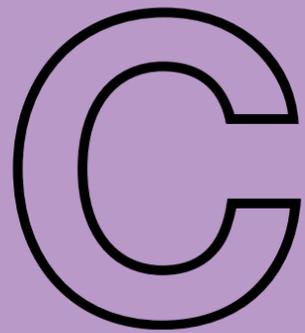
European Alternatives imagines a world where activism is not just a calling but a transformational force for all. The ACT Stream supports EA's mission to demand and implement democracy, equality, and culture beyond the nation-state. The objective remains to amplify the demands of frontline communities, by forging partnerships so that they resonate at the local, national, and European levels. The ACT Stream champions causes that align with the core values of equity, justice, and sustainability, with a focus on intersectional rights, workers' rights and nature rights.

This Stream goes beyond advocacy: reshaping power relations and nurturing solidarity across borders takes a combination of activism, lobbying, and advocacy to connect grassroots movements to decision-makers, fostering collaboration that empowers activists to challenge the status quo.

EA has done advocacy and sought to influence decision-making since its inception in 2007, when the team was made of young people determined to shape the world around them. Over time, its efforts have evolved from grassroots organizing to a more formal advocacy role, reflecting its commitment to achieving meaningful change.

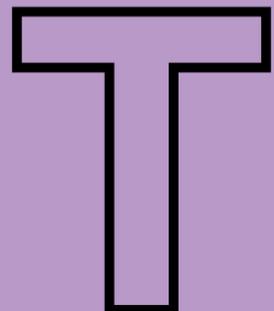
Today, our work is closely linked with the efforts of the Assemble stream, notably by piloting and promoting a transnational citizen assembly (Democratic Odyssey) and demonstrating to citizens throughout Europe that other forms of democratic participation are possible and should be defended. EA also works with networks of partners, whether a network of welcoming cities, at the frontline of the defense of rights of the more vulnerable, to promote participatory democracy - or a network of social movements and grassroots groups and organisations committed to defending people's rights. Finally, EA supports local actions led by activists, targeting their respective communities, most notably through FIERCE (feminist actions), TACKLE (in defense of migrants' rights) and YMCA (for the participation of youth).

This stream leverages connections, audiences, and influence to spotlight issues that matter, whether through its own campaigns or by



strengthening others' initiatives. We do this work by identifying demands from activists and communities and shaping them into compelling messages or campaigns tailored for decision-makers, and securing support through campaigning or local actions to capture influence over policy processes. Our counterparts include from actors directly involved in decision-making, in institutions or in the civil society - direct targets or partners of our work, to media, unions and think tanks who produce powerful messaging and analysis that drive our demands; last but not least, we involve emerging activists and communities who are not usually involved - as we seek to make citizen action accessible and impactful and restore faith in political action.

This chapter includes some of the most important calls to action of our times, from different activists in our larger community. Magid Magid, Union of Justice founder, opens with *If you care about the climate, you have to care about Palestine*, calling upon the needed solidarity across liberation movements. Myriam Bahaffou, academic & activist, continues the argument for intersectional activism from a lens of ecofeminism, care practices and queer theory in *Reclaiming the term 'pro-life'*, and Ava Vales Toledano, Toutes des Femmes member, recounts a history of transphobia & misogyny in *The trickle-down effect of infringements on gender rights in sports and society*.



If You Care About the Climate, You Have to Care About Palestine

Magid Magid

An olive tree in the West Bank wall © rrodrickeiler



The climate movement across Britain and Europe is confronting a profound moral and political challenge in light of Israel’s recent and most devastating assault on Gaza. This violence is not a sudden or isolated event—it is part of a continuous campaign of occupation and oppression that has persisted for decades and escalated significantly over the past 420 days. Since the intensification of hostilities in October 2023, the situation in Gaza has reached unprecedented levels of devastation, with global experts and human rights organisations, including [Amnesty International](#), classifying recent actions as genocide.

The ethical imperative to oppose such brutality is unequivocal. For the climate justice movement, the connection between environmental degradation and systemic oppression in Palestine demands urgent attention. The occupation of Palestinian land is not only a humanitarian crisis but also an environmental catastrophe, with profound implications for global justice.

Environmental Colonialism in Occupied Palestine

Environmental degradation in Palestine is not merely an unfortunate consequence of occupation—it is a weapon of control. Israel’s policies have inflicted severe harm on Palestine’s ecosystems and agricultural economy. For instance, the water crisis in Palestine is deeply rooted in systematic inequalities. Israel controls 85% of the water resources in the region, leaving Palestinians with minimal access to clean and sufficient water. According to [United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia](#), this disproportionate allocation of water undermines Palestinian agricultural practices, prevents economic development, and increases dependence on Israeli infrastructure.

“Environmental degradation in Palestine is not merely an unfortunate consequence of occupation—it is a weapon of control.”

Similarly, Israel’s consistent destruction of olive trees—cultural and economic symbols for Palestinians—is another stark example of environmental colonialism. Over 800,000 olive trees have been uprooted since 1967, with intensified efforts over the past 420 days, impacting livelihoods and removing a crucial symbol of resilience. In Gaza, the situation is even direr. Toxic munitions, such as white phosphorus used during Israeli military operations, have polluted the [soil and groundwater](#), making agricultural activity almost impossible and exacerbating public health crises).

These deliberate acts of environmental destruction are a form of ecological warfare, aimed at eroding the Palestinian people’s ability to sustain themselves on their own land.

The War Against Land and People

As the climate movement has gradually become attuned to the centrality of migrant justice and of fighting violent border policies to its own campaigning, so too should that be extended to its logical conclusion: supporting the struggle of Palestinians against the matrix of domination that governs land and life in occupied Palestine, both in war and during times of 'peace'.

The occupation of Palestine represents one of the clearest examples of how land, people, and environmental justice intersect. The Israeli government has implemented policies that systemically destroy the natural resources Palestinians rely upon, while simultaneously subjecting them to violence and displacement.

In the West Bank, the apartheid wall, spanning over 700 kilometres, slices through Palestinian communities and agricultural lands. This wall not only physically isolates Palestinians but also acts as a mechanism of environmental apartheid, denying them access to fertile land and water sources. These policies, which have intensified in enforcement over the last 420 days, are echoed globally, where militarised borders and exclusionary land policies disproportionately affect marginalised communities (Middle East Monitor).

Fishing off Gaza's coast is another poignant example. Palestinians are restricted to a narrow six-nautical-mile zone, severely limiting their ability to sustain their fishing industry, a cornerstone of Gaza's economy. This is exacerbated by the repeated destruction of fishing boats and infrastructure during military offensives, especially during the ongoing siege that began over 420 days ago. As [Middle East Eye](#) reports, this restriction is part of a broader strategy to erode Gaza's self-sufficiency.

These instances reveal the inseparable nature of the climate crisis, environmental justice, and the Palestinian struggle for liberation.

“The climate movement cannot afford to remain neutral or silent on Palestine. True climate justice requires dismantling the structures of oppression that enable environmental destruction, militarisation, and colonialism. Supporting Palestinian liberation is not a distraction from this work—it is an essential part of it.”

European Complicity in Oppression

European governments have not only remained complicit in Israel's policies but have also actively supported them. Despite international condemnation of Israel's actions, European leaders continue to provide military, economic, and political backing. Germany, for example, remains one of the largest exporters of arms to Israel ([Euronews](#)) and including the EU's [€18 million](#) funding to support Israel's 'strategic communication and public diplomacy': effectively rewarding its genocidal brutality.

In Britain, both major political parties have aligned themselves with Israel from the beginning of the siege, with then Prime Minister Rishi Sunak affirming unwavering support. The current Prime Minister Keir Starmer has also publicly condemned protests against Israeli aggression, making clear that no significant policy shift will occur under this Labour government (The Independent).

Across Europe, solidarity with Palestine has been systematically suppressed. In Germany, authorities have banned Palestinian solidarity organisations and demonstrations, citing vague accusations of extremism. France went so far as to [outlaw pro-Palestine protests](#) altogether, sparking widespread criticism of its authoritarian crackdown on free expression. The UK, meanwhile, [deployed new anti-protest laws](#), originally designed to target climate activists, to silence dissent on Palestine.

These actions exposed a chilling trend across Europe: a growing authoritarianism that targets both climate justice movements and Palestine solidarity campaigns. This complicity not only emboldens Israeli aggression but also reflects Europe's broader history of upholding systems of oppression and colonialism.

The Case for Solidarity

The struggle for Palestinian liberation is inherently tied to the global fight for environmental and climate justice. The climate movement must recognise that the same forces driving environmental destruction—colonialism, militarism, and racism—are at the heart of the oppression faced by Palestinians.

Palestine serves as a microcosm of how environmental injustice and systemic violence intertwine. As Gaza's lands are poisoned and its resources depleted, Palestinians are forced into further reliance on external aid, creating cycles of dependency and erasure. This mirrors the exploitation of Global South communities by industrialised nations, where climate-induced resource scarcity often exacerbates inequalities.



Transeuropa Festival 2024 © Claudia Correnti

The climate justice movement has made strides in recognising the centrality of migrant justice and border abolition in its advocacy. Yet it has largely failed to apply these principles to Palestine. This oversight weakens the movement's moral and political foundation. To truly address the climate crisis, activists must confront all systems of domination, including the occupation of Palestine.

Moving Forward

The sirens should be sounding loud and clear for climate justice campaigners: the battle against Palestine solidarity is part and parcel of the Europe-wide shift towards authoritarian repression, and the racism directed against Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims in Europe reflects the grotesque hierarchy of humanity that Europe has long sought to uphold.

The climate movement cannot afford to remain neutral or silent on Palestine. True climate justice requires dismantling the structures of oppression that enable environmental destruction, militarisation, and colonialism. Supporting Palestinian liberation is not a distraction from this work—it is an essential part of it.

As the climate movement continues to expand its focus

to encompass issues of social justice and human rights, it must fully embrace the Palestinian struggle as central to its mission. This involves amplifying Palestinian voices, challenging European complicity, and demanding accountability for environmental and human rights violations.

At a time when the world is grappling with unprecedented climate challenges, the lessons from Palestine are clear. The fight for environmental justice is inseparable from the fight against colonialism and racism. Injustice anywhere, whether in the form of poisoned lands in Gaza or rising seas in the Pacific, threatens justice everywhere.

The climate movement has long promised to be the defining battle of our generation. To fulfil this promise, it must act with courage and clarity, recognising Palestinian liberation as a cornerstone of global justice. By doing so, it can transform its vision of a just and sustainable future into reality.

Reclaiming the term 'pro-life': a queer, vitalist ecofeminist perspective

with Myriam Bahaffou

Panel debate on *Care Ethics* at Morion during Transeuropa, featuring Alice Dal Gobbo, Myriam Bahaffou, Paola Imperatore, and Roberta da Soller © Claudia Correnti



Myriam Bahaffou, philosopher and leading voice in intersectional ecofeminist thought in France, participated in the 2024 edition of Transeuropa Festival – Undercurrents, held in Venice this November. This year's festival, centered around the theme of water and its myriad intersections, created a space for critical discussions on the interplay of ecology, feminism, and justice. Bahaffou was a panelist at the event *Care ethics for radical ecologies: ecofeminist perspectives towards a careful future*, hosted on Friday, November 8, at the Laboratorio Occupato Morion in Venice, alongside Alice Dal Gobbo (Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Trento), Paola Imperatore (Researcher, University of Pisa), and Roberta da Soller (actress and representative of the Comitato No Grandi Navi di Venezia).

This interview, conducted among the evocative canals of Venice, features questions by Noemi Pittalà and Jacc Griffiths from the EA team.

Originally conducted in French, the conversation was later translated into English. A segment of this dialogue is also featured in a documentary exploring ecofeminism, with a particular focus on hydrofeminism, available [here](#).

Dive into this compelling exchange as Bahaffou reclaims language, delves into the radical politics of care, and envisions ecological and feminist futures rooted in fluidity, regeneration, and resistance.

In your work, you talk about reclaiming the term “pro-life.” How do you envision a new way of using these words within an intersectional ecofeminist framework?

Why do I believe it's important to reclaim the term “pro-life”? This term is currently monopolized by anti-feminist or anti-choice movements—which are inherently anti-feminist—and seeks to confine the idea of life to heteronormative reproduction within heteropatriarchal frameworks. These frameworks dictate that life can only occur under the authority of two parents within a nuclear family structure, often rooted in strong religious underpinnings, designed to restrict the realm of education and reproduction within that

specific context. In intersectional ecofeminist politics, beyond the provocative nature of this proposal, there's a genuine interest in closely examining which terms have been stripped from us—what words we've been dispossessed of, especially within radical leftist, feminist, and queer feminist spaces. Terms like family, reproduction, sexuality, and even life itself have become, in some sense, taboo or tinged with polemics in our circles. This is largely because they've been overwhelmingly appropriated by the far right or anti-feminist factions.

This poses a significant issue because words like life, family, reproduction, sexuality, genitality, eroticism, desire — these are terms that can carry a deeply positive connotation. My work engages directly with this tension, and I believe that the more we avoid or feel shame about addressing what life is — even on a biological level — which reflects a certain dichotomy between social sciences and biological sciences (or “hard sciences”) in feminist discourse — the more we hit an impasse. Reclaiming the term “pro-life,” with added complexity and clarity about what we mean by it, is fundamental to redefining feminism — specifically ecofeminism — as a politics that seeks to perpetuate life in all its forms.

Perpetuating life, in the way I advocate, must involve confronting systems of repression or control over life and reproduction head-on, even promoting their abolition. Currently, life and reproduction are governed by a heteropatriarchal framework of the nuclear family, with heteronormative, biparental reproduction in private spaces, perpetuated through conservative ideals. But this notion of life is not life in its entirety — it is a very specific, highly repressed form of life that perpetuates inequality by serving capital and heteropatriarchy. Once we reclaim the concept of life and closely examine it, we realize there's almost a queer definition of life inherent within it. Many of us have been saying this for a long time: the expression of life manifests in myriad ways. Even scientifically or biologically, the study of life — biology — demonstrates that the phenomenon of life is far from confined to sexual reproduction.

The hatred toward life, encapsulated in political projects aimed at domesticating and controlling life to ensure its reproduction under rigid norms, is precisely what ecofeminism opposes today. In these frameworks, life is only granted value when it can be commodified, such as seeds or animals gaining value only when they generate monetary wealth or capital accumulation.

This is why we must return to talking about life — or rather, lives and forms of life. I prefer the plural because it highlights the non-linear, branching, and proliferating nature of life. This vision is deeply ecological — not only in how we view the world but also in how we build relationships within it. This stands in stark contrast to a linear view of life, which can even be co-opted by forms of ecofascism. Historically, fas-

cist movements have heavily invested in the rhetoric of life, framing it as the ultimate expression of civilization. They either depict life as belonging to a chosen group or romanticize a mythical golden age, justifying the extermination or suppression of minorities deemed to pollute the “true” course of life.

Reappropriating the word life is not politically simple; it brings its own challenges. But from the perspectives of queerness, ecology, and non-conservative feminism, which refuses to confine women to their uterus as the sole source of life on Earth, there's much to be done with this term. This includes decolonial movements, land reclamation, the resurgence of indigeneity, and queer politics — all of which assert, “We have ways of life that have been silenced, devalued, and now we want to live according to them.”

So, there's a deeply biological aspect that needs to be reclaimed from a feminist perspective, alongside a social sciences approach and a symbolic one. These three layers—biology, social science, and symbolism—constitute how we can reclaim the concept of life. Being “pro-life,” in the sense of supporting the proliferation of all forms of life outside systems of control, discipline, and authoritarianism, is crucial for developing vibrant, joyful, and living politics. Only then can we move beyond authoritarian, control-driven frameworks that stifle life.

From symbolism across cultures and history to biology within modern sciences, water is considered the giver of life to the world—so why do we mistreat water, the source of life?

Why is water viewed so negatively and devalued when it constitutes a significant part of the Earth, our bodies, and the space in which we are born and live on this planet?

One perspective from ecofeminism—and even hydrofeminism—is to identify a form of patriarchal negativity here. Water is considered, across various historical and cultural contexts, as a feminine element. It is often interpreted as representative of a feminine nature in an essentialist sense: water is what changes, renews, is never the same twice, is fluid, chaotic, and sometimes threatening. For instance, in literature about sailors, fishermen, and adventurers (even pirates), water is often feminized, as are ships. This is because they embody an inscrutable darkness that, in the collective patriarchal imagination, recalls the enigmatic feminine nature: something unpredictable, whose reactions are never entirely certain. This is one of patriarchy's favorite ways to describe women and femininity—as something deeply irrational, unfixed, and ever-changing.

Symbolically, and I would argue quite tangibly, these associations are significant. They influence how we view gender, elements, and behaviors. Water's

changing and elusive nature not only justifies differentiated treatment of women but also impacts how we treat the Earth and its liquid spaces. These are spaces to be penetrated, probed, and controlled, much like the extractivist treatment of land. This has implications for how femininity is defined—often as “soft,” as seen in terms like “soft power.” Such language reflects an undervaluation of what isn't “hard,” in the sense of being mineral, solid, and constructive, tied to accumulation and dominance. Consider the rhetoric of political figures like Trump, with his emphasis on building walls and erecting boundaries. These ideas rely on concrete, hardened elements, reflecting a patriarchal and phallic representation of power. This extends to the dichotomy between “hard sciences” (seen as more exact, real, and credible) and “soft sciences” like social sciences.

So, should we abandon water, given these essentialist associations between water, softness, and femininity, as opposed to land or minerals? The answer lies in hydrofeminism, a perspective central to ecofeminism today. It calls for reclaiming our aqueous, liquid nature—not because we are women or minorities but because we are terrestrial and aqueous beings.

Our terrestrial condition is inherently tied to water. Practices like water births and artisanal birth methods reflect a reconnection with our liquid nature. Water can be revalued not just as a space for recreation or pleasure but as a way of building relationships and shaping the world. This idea aligns with gender fluidity—why should change and fluidity be seen as weaknesses? This perception reflects patriarchal politics that resist hybrid, aqueous ways of making the world, favoring rigidity and control. Once again, this connects to conceptions of life itself. Talking about water doesn't necessarily imply a maternal or womb-like perspective. For me, water is an inherently queer, androgynous element. It embodies a cosmology of constant renewal, mutation and regeneration.

On a more environmental justice note, today's climate crisis is drying up once water-rich areas. Urbanization and concrete infrastructures speed rainwater runoff, leading to floods like those recently seen in Spain. This material neglect of water—its role in giving life—underscores how water is controlled and contained. Yet water's very nature resists containment.

In movements against mega-dams in France for instance, we see the urgency of rethinking water politics. Access to clean, potable water and its equitable distribution are critical issues globally. These challenges are not confined to historically colonized nations; even countries in the Global North face severe water scarcity. Environmental justice demands pro-life policies (to borrow the term), ones that ensure regeneration and equitable access to water, recognizing its vital role in sustaining life. Lastly, women, particularly in the Global South, bear the responsibility of managing water. They collect and distribute

water in regions where it doesn't simply flow from a tap. Devaluing water reinforces patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist systems of exploitation. Women are the first to suffer the consequences of water scarcity and environmental injustice, making the fight for water a feminist issue.

By reclaiming water's significance and shifting from control to reverence, we can reshape our relationship with life itself.

Your work often highlights the intersection of ecofeminism with emotional politics and desire. How do you believe the ethics of care can transform our collective approach to climate justice, especially when looking through a transfeminist lens?

First, this question stems from the (false) perception that care is only a cis women work and activity. This misinterprets the essence of care ethics. When care ethics first emerged in feminist thought, particularly through Carol Gilligan's work in feminist psychology, the focus was on describing how gendered socialization shapes moral reasoning in girls and boys. It showed how girls, due to their socialization, were more accustomed to resolving moral dilemmas in ways that sought to accommodate everyone rather than favoring certain groups at the expense of others. So, even from the outset, care ethics was about gendered socialization rather than being inherently tied to women.

Later, researchers like Joan Tronto and Sandra Laugier succeeded in politicizing care, moving it beyond psychology. They demonstrated that care is not just an attitude but also a domain of activity. In this sense, care becomes about the practices and professions that sustain the world. This reframes care as a system of activities that enable the world's daily regeneration and prevent it from collapsing. It spans a wide spectrum, from public gardeners to nurses, educators, and maintenance workers.

Here, care intersects with race, class, and gender. This systemic lens detaches care from its psychological origins—a shift that's been happening since the 1990s—and positions it as central to sustainability.

I understand ecology as the ways we create relationships to sustain the world and life. This definition aligns perfectly with the relational nature of care. In activist spaces—and beyond—care politics have always characterized queer and trans communities.

Put simply, if trans people had not organized themselves through grassroots networks—often without institutional recognition or support—they would not exist today. For trans communities, care is not about benevolence, protection, or even well-being. Care here is radical politics; it's about sustainability and survival.

When discussing care, we must avoid reducing it to something harmless or gentle. Care, as practiced by marginalized communities, is an act of resistance against a world that seeks to eradicate them. Today, there is a global call to erase trans people—this is a fact. Acknowledging this makes it clear that care cannot be seen as a naturalized role belonging solely to cis women.

Instead, we must de-naturalize care, a process that feminist theorists and activists are actively advancing. Care, redefined, becomes a practice of attention: what do we pay attention to in our daily lives? In our activist spaces, which are deeply impacted by collective trauma—colonial trauma, present-day trauma from ongoing genocides, and the proliferation of extreme violence—care politics are essential for survival.

This brings us to what I call the ecology of relationships: activism cannot be limited to anti-racist, feminist, or decolonial struggles—or even to strategic, combative resistance against the hegemony of heteropatriarchal and colonial systems. It must also include what I would call “politics of radical love.” I know how much this idea of love sounds ridiculous in contemporary activist spaces, but I question why it seems so. Within decolonial and anti-racist movements, love—whether in families or communities—plays a critical role.

In liberal feminist spaces, words like family and community have often become taboo. Yet in many other spaces, these terms are being reclaimed. Here, love is expressed as care, as attention, as a form of solidarity that underpins all activism. These connections—whether we call them sisterhood, community, or something else—are rooted in affect and desire. We cannot conceive politics solely as a battlefield; it must also encompass forms of desire and attention. These politics of care are essential for the survival, expansion, proliferation, and resistance of both queer and decolonial movements today.

Intersectionality is central to your work, especially in connecting antispeciesism, racial justice, and ecofeminism. Why do you believe an intersectional approach is essential when addressing ecological crises, and how can it guide us toward more inclusive and effective solutions for environmental justice?

Intersectionality is fundamental today for understanding the systems of domination and oppression we face, as well as how power dynamics operate both within activist movements and on a broader systemic, global scale. Why is it so crucial? Because it prevents the creation of a hierarchy of struggles, causes, or values.

Historically, we’ve seen this kind of hierarchy play out—for example, between Marxism and femi-

nism, feminists were told that class was more important than gender, that after the proletarian revolution, things would “naturally” get better for women. In the history of liberal feminism, same thing happened: “third world women” and decolonial issues were put aside, saying that feminism was the struggle that was supposed to eradicate all forms of domination. But racialized women within white feminism have been silenced and their agenda wasn’t matching any of their expectations and social issues.

No single struggle is innocent of perpetuating oppression within itself. This is the key contribution of intersectionality: it reveals the blind spots within our own movements. Intersectionality doesn’t create a “bingo card” of oppressions. Instead, both the theory and practice—which originates from Black feminism, recognize that a person can simultaneously experience oppression and act as an oppressor in different ways.

The challenge is to conceptualize this politically—neither treating it as a weakness or paralysis nor reinstating a hierarchy of “I am more oppressed” or “I am more of an oppressor.” Intersectionality helps us see the complexities and interconnectedness of our identities and struggles. It demands that we engage in politics with humility, a quality much needed in activist spaces across all spheres. In order to do that we need to feel love for the world we want to build, just as much as rage or anger, otherwise we condemn ourselves to reproduce the very attitudes we want to eradicate, by shaming people, making them feel like they don’t have enough value and worth in our spaces.

While intersectionality has certainly been co-opted by liberal or capitalist frameworks that turn identity into a marketable commodity, this should not erase its radical roots. Intersectional activism aims to expose the overlapping of oppressions and how they become illegible when viewed solely through hierarchical categories or rigid binaries. By embracing this multiscaled approach, we can dismantle systems of oppression more effectively and create complex solutions for environmental justice, by being more sensitive to the diversity of our people.

The trickle-down

effect of infringements

Ava Vales Toledano

on gender rights in

sports and society

Ava Vales Toledano is in a group called Toutes des Femmes, created in 2020 to fight the attack from different political organizations against trans women, and, trans women and their place in feminism. Ava also works specifically on the issues trans women face in sports, and is a high-performance athlete herself in whitewater kayaking. In this text, Ava demonstrates how competitive sports have both exemplified and been used to create transphobia within larger society.

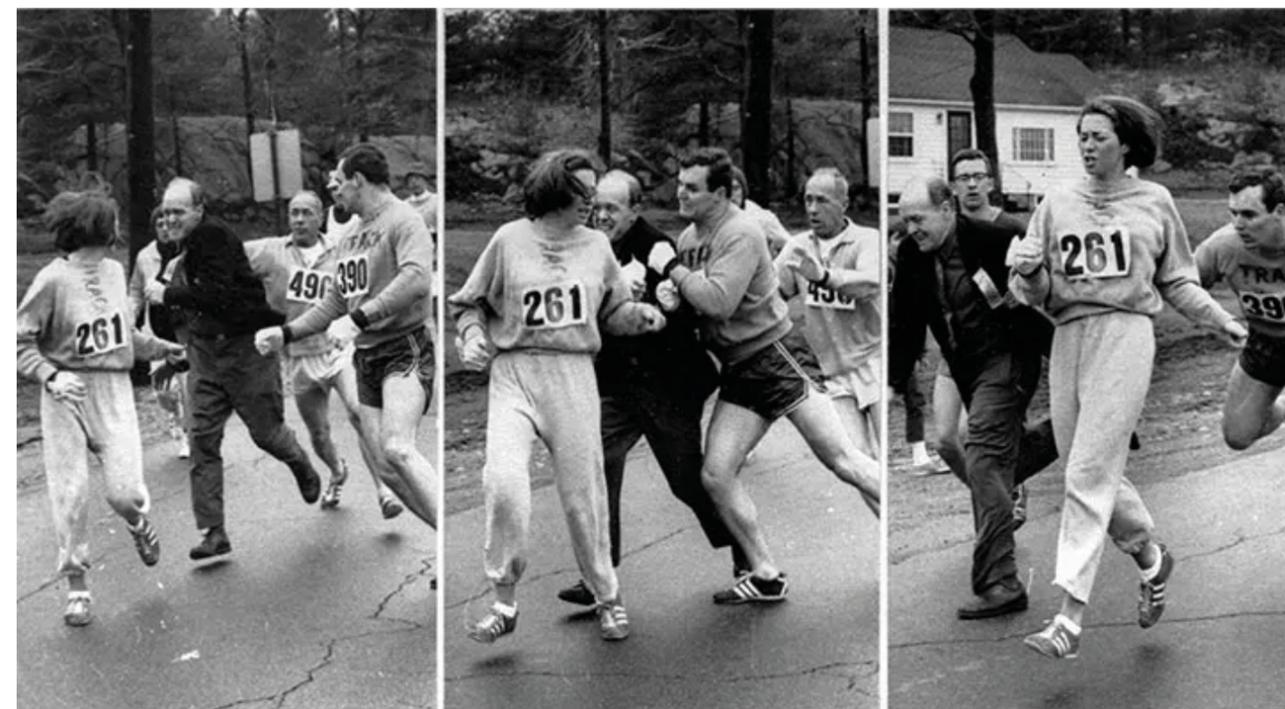
This article is an edit from Ava's keynote speech during European Alternative's Marginal Literature Festival in Seine-Saint-Denis in summer 2024, which explored the intersection between gender creation and sport. In a current political landscape where gender is being instrumentalized on the political stage, evident in during Trump's US election campaign or Macron's attack on the Front Populaire's manifesto, the work of groups like Toutes des Femmes is invaluable in challenging the increasing infringements to trans and gender rights.

I lived in France my whole life. Then when I was 20, around the same time that I started transitioning, I moved to Norway as it is great for whitewater kayaking. I started getting much better than I was when I was living in France, so I also started being interested in signing up for competitions. I always felt that there was a bit of friction, but that friction was delayed quite a bit because I kept getting injured before the actual competitions.

When I signed up for my first competition, the European Championships, the organization came to me and they said they knew there was going to be some backlash about it. In anticipation, they copy-pasted the International Olympic Committee (IOC) regulation, whitewater kayaking is an extreme sport, so there's no international governing body setting rules. A few years later, a rare time I was not injured before a competition, I won.

The next year, I moved back to France, and I was interested in signing up for the World Championships. I noticed a new chapter in the rulebook, specifically ruling that trans women were no longer allowed in the women category, and instead, they created an "open category", which was for men, and, maybe other individuals. I thought that was bullshit. And I got vocal about it.

This was the point where I started paying more attention to attacks on trans rights, as I understood that the ruling was purely political. Women in sports has always been a topic



Katherine Switzer at the 1967 Boston Marathon © Boston Herald

of debate, originally excluded from professional sports due to their domestic status in society, the first Olympic Games with a significant female presence was in 1928. Even then, women were still not allowed to participate in sports that were deemed to be too masculine and may develop the body in a way that was perceived as being non-feminine (it was not until the 2000s that women have joined sports such as weightlifting and boxing). In the assumption of men's predisposed advantage to women, there was already fear that men would cross-dress in an attempt to win in women's sports - which never happened - but from the late 1930s gynecological tests were implemented for all women to see if they were actual women. There was some discussion around trans athletes, mainly because the public had a voyeuristic interest, but mostly people were allowed to compete in their correct category.

Women's participation was pushed back further when they started performing "too well". During the first Boston marathon with women in 1967, Katherine Switzer was physically held back by the organizer and had to fight to run the marathon, it was then not until 1984 that women could join the marathon in the Olympics. In the late 1990s, hormonal testing replaced gynecological to see if women were feminine enough to participate in sports, however, aside from anti-doping testing, no longer were all female athletes tested, but only those who "drew attention to themselves". This style of testing focused on single individuals showed very early on big problems with racism and lesbophobia.

In the last 10-15 years sporting regulations have become a huge issue for intersex females, and for trans women. For intersex individuals, athletes are being forced to take testosterone blockers to be able to compete due to lower and lower regulations on testosterone levels, in addition to the health implications, the governing body is trying to rule how women's bodies should be, how it should perform. For trans women, they are being increasingly excluded from competitions due to an assumption that men have genetic predetermined advantage to women, and that transitioning wouldn't impact this so-called advantage. It's a way to reassign trans women to the assigned gender that they had at birth.

The public is not very aware of how high-performance sports work on a biological level, or how gender and transitioning affect the body, therefore it's very easy to start pushing the idea that trans women do not belong in sports. Then it trickles down. If trans women do not belong in high-performance sports, then they do not belong either in club sports or in all public sports. Then they do not belong either in school sports, some U.S. states have tried to pass laws to restrict the participation of trans children in sports as young as four.

Sports are supposed to be universal. They are a mirror of society. If you make people believe that it is fair to discuss if trans women belong in sports, then the debate goes further and people start to believe that it is fair to discuss if trans women belong in society in general.

“Sports are supposed to be universal. They are a mirror of society. If you make people believe that it is fair to discuss if trans women belong in sports, then the debate goes further and people start to believe that it is fair to discuss if trans women belong in society in general.”

The far-right has long figured out that directly attacking a marginalized group is not very good press, they have understood that it's much easier to attack a group of people by saying you are protecting another who are deemed unable to protect themselves. The Ku Klux Klan claimed all their violence against black Americans were to protect white women, the last decades attack on migrant rights have supposedly been to protect the nations family. The same thing is happening now, the far right and anti-gender groups attacking trans women in sports are claiming to be protecting feminine sports. If this was true, they would have been present for years, calling out the real issues that women's sports are facing, which is a lack of money, a cruel lack of money, a lack of sponsorship, and huge problems with sexual aggressions. These are the problems that women's sports have to deal with still today on a constant basis, which are not spoken about. The focus on trans womens place in sport is a strategy that has been used to attack the place of trans women in society in general.

So, the question is what can we do against these attacks?

Obviously, we can try to implement different rules when it comes to sports governing bodies. In 2020, we were hopeful for this when the International Olympic Committee (IOC) changed its rulings on trans women and intersex women in sports, and published guidelines that organizations should follow to implement a progressive and inclusive rulebook, however, for the first time, the implementation was at the choice and responsibility of each sports organization. In practice, most sports organizations have lacked the political courage to keep to these guidelines, when attacked by anti-gender groups they have banned trans women, often without an attempt at justification. For example, last summer, the international governing body for cycling banned trans women, and in justification, shared a single study that compares the athletic performance of cis women against cis men, as if the biology of trans women is the exact same as the biology of cis men, that transitioning has no effect whatsoever on the body. The lack of even an attempt at a convincing justification shows this is an excuse to avoid potential backlash.

Toutes des Femmes and I are trying to change this by advocating amongst different governing bodies, but obviously, it is not enough. The one thing that needs to be done to make sports better for trans women and for intersex women, is to create a wider place for them in society, and to fight for their rights in a much broader way. If we can fight for our rights in society as a whole, and if our place in society cannot be dilated, then it won't be in sports. The issue is not about sports, it's about society in general.

“The one thing that needs to be done to make sports better for trans women and for intersex women, is to create a wider place for them in society, and to fight for their rights in a much broader way. If we can fight for our rights

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Festival au Musée Paul Éluard, Saint-Denis 28 - 30 juin 2024

Littératures en marges

Représentations

Célébrations

Actions

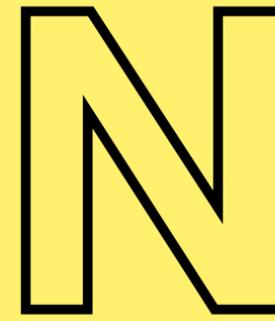
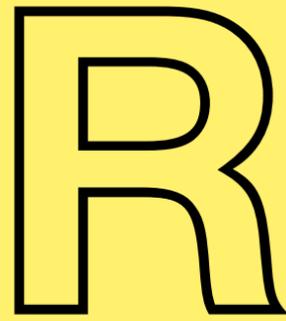
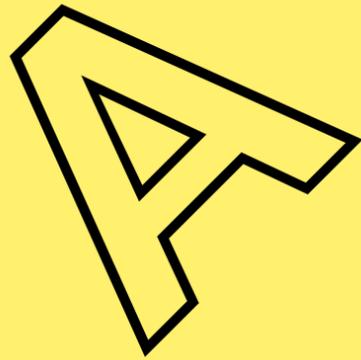
pour un sport inclusif

atelier d'écriture
performance de voguing
lectures performées
soirée cinéma

atelier de boxe queer
table ronde
ateliers expérimentaux créatifs
initiation au consentement dans le sport

The poster is a vibrant blue collage. At the top left, a soccer player in a white jersey is captured mid-air, kicking a ball. To the right, a hand is shown in a celebratory fist pump. Below these, a pair of boxing gloves is depicted. In the center, a circular icon contains a cross and a plus sign, with arrows pointing outwards. The text 'Littératures en marges' is prominently displayed in a large, bold, black font. Below the main title, four dark blue banners with white text read 'Représentations', 'Célébrations', 'Actions', and 'pour un sport inclusif'. At the bottom, there are two columns of smaller text listing activities: 'atelier d'écriture', 'performance de voguing', 'lectures performées', and 'soirée cinéma' on the left; and 'atelier de boxe queer', 'table ronde', 'ateliers expérimentaux créatifs', and 'initiation au consentement dans le sport' on the right. The bottom edge of the poster is lined with various logos, including 'ea', 'UNIVERSITÉ DE SAINT-DENIS', 'LECRAN', 'CRITICAL CHANGE LAB', 'The Three Hijabs', and 'GONGLE'.

Poster Le Festival des Littératures en Marges (FLEM) revient à Saint-Denis. Design by Billie Dibb (EA)



by Niccolo Milanese

The Learn stream builds on our analysis across all other streams of what would be useful knowledge shared across our ecosystem to advance our objectives of democracy, equality and culture beyond the nation state.

Current research priorities include understanding the gender-backlash and successful strategies of feminist mobilization, analysing and combating toxic-masculinity online, developing and testing a new model of democratic citizenship education which is relational, action-oriented, and integrates human- technology and human-non-human relations. Each of these priorities sees major Horizon funded research projects starting or continuing over 2025: FIERCE investigating Feminist Movements Revitalising Democracy in Europe; EMMELO European Men, Masculinity and Extremist Leadership online; and CCLABs Critical Change Labs for Democratic education. Each of these projects is realized with transnational consortia of universities and practitioners, and privilege action-oriented research which involves researchers working together with practitioners to develop grounded and practically useful knowledge. Particularly important for us in our research approach is to ensure that all knowledge produced can be appropriated and used by the communities it is produced with and that we seek to support, including young people, activists, those without rights or at risk of losing rights, NGOs and practitioners.

Underlying all of our research approach is an enlarged conception of what democracy means, which simultaneously relates democracy to our everyday lives, material conditions, experiences and relations and relates democracy to the planetary issues and problems which go beyond borders. As such, our research contributes to ensuring our approach to democracy adopts a different geometry to that of the nation-state, which situates democracy in representative institutions based on an abstraction derived from territory and blood relations whilst atomizing individual citizens, and draws a border between national and international affairs. Our approach develops relational conception of democracy which is simultaneously highly local and situated and planetary, is fluid rather than static, and is based on collective capacity to act rather than the delegation of powers.

A crucial conceptual innovation is to work with the dual terms 'translocalism' and 'transnationalism' as ways of thinking, speaking and acting outside of the national frame, and developing a non-national

conception of *citizenship* grounded in political capacity and dignity which ensures that this shift away from the nation is not made at the price of technocracy or corporate governance, and seeks ceaselessly to be inclusive of everyone rather than reinforce the violence of division and loss of rights. As such European citizenship, which is the most advanced contemporary form of citizenship at least partly emancipated from the national frame, is still a promising legal and conceptual category to work with, whilst guarding against all attempts to turn European citizenship into a fortress.

Communicating our research amongst our ecosystem of other activists and NGOs is a priority, but working with local authorities as well as European institutions is also a crucial aspect of our learning strategy. The learning we do and promote seeks to identify those possibilities of transformative action that can be brought about by civil society interacting with formal power. Similarly, communicating and discussing our learning with stakeholders such as foundations and others who hold resources is a crucial element of our realistic approach to bringing about systemic change.

Throughout all of our research activities we seek to privilege the voices and experience of those most excluded from a nationalized conception of politics, and the methodological nationalism in research that reinforces it. These voices and experiences include those of migrants, racialized people, gender minorities, manual workers and arts workers, young people and people who have experienced violence.

In this chapter, we present some of our research priorities by exploring current projects and showcasing important external contributions. Shalini Randeria, president of Central European University, argues we are in a time of rising soft authoritarianism and offers insights on how to combat this in *Caring for liberal democracy and womens' rights against soft authoritarian assault*. Then the interview *In-between Law and Feminism* with Maria Francesca De Tullio, researcher & activist, focuses on the importance of transnational solidarity in movements such as European Alternatives' FIERCE project to address dwindling gender rights. The journal is closed with *Everyday Democracy in Action: Towards Critical Change Through Youth Engagement* by Jacc Griffiths, EA research assistant, who describes European Alternatives' work on including youth in politics.

Caring for liberal democracy and womens' rights against soft authoritarian assault

Shalini Randeria

Transeuropa Festival 2024 (Venice, Undercurrents edition) - | Lagoon Procession - Unknown Waters (Floating Concert on rowing boats) curated by Edoardo Aruta, Alessandra Messali, and Paolo Rosso. Presented by Microclima.



Paradoxically, the expansion of democracy worldwide has often gone hand in hand with its erosion from within by formal democratically legitimized means. Many citizens in Western countries have lost trust in liberal democracy due to unfulfilled expectations or economic inequality after neoliberal austerity policies. They feel increasingly powerlessness to make their voice heard or influence decisions affecting their daily lives. These grievances coupled with anxiety caused by socio-cultural, religious and sexual diversity, makes it easier for right-wing populist parties to stir fears of a supposedly imminent loss of identity. A diffuse sense of disappointment and resentment among voters is instrumentalized by democratically elected charismatic demagogues. They consolidate their own power using disinformation and a politics of hate spread through social media. But these soft authoritarian leaders also strengthen their grip on power by manipulating voting laws to insidiously change the rules of the game. In these regimes rule by law replaces the rule of law. The result is a permanent structural transformation of the state and a gradual shift towards soft authoritarianism. We are, therefore, not just dealing with a crisis of representative democracy. Rather, democracy itself is at stake today.

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Soft-authoritarian regimes are a new phenomenon that blur the boundaries between democracy and autocracy by using parliamentary majorities, legal and constitutional means as well as courts, as is currently in the USA. Whether in Hungary, India, Israel, the Philippines, Turkey or the USA, to name but a few cases in point, the style of government shows striking similarities. Without declaring a formal state of emergency, civil rights, especially women's rights and minority rights, are being undermined slowly but systematically. Expressing dissent is made increasingly difficult not only due to cooptation of the media but by labelling political opposition as “anti-national”. While liberal civil society organizations are attacked, far-right, often religious right-wing groups are strengthened through state support. Soft authoritarian governments do not shy away from using state machinery at their disposal to harass political and civil society opponents, who are treated as enemies. Therefore, courts, independent

NGOs and media, as well as universities - the very institutions that can stand up to authoritarian politics - are among the primary targets of soft-authoritarian regimes.

Several other features besides a pronounced anti-liberalism can serve to identify this newly emerging form of rule: The close nexus between oligarchs and politicians (“crony capitalism”); charismatic demagogues, who often embodies a toxic masculinity; an aggressive ethno-religious nationalism that, is strongly associated with notions of “purity of the nation”. The marginalization of minorities is a consequence of such an imagination of an ethnically, racially or religiously homogeneous nation that is defined as a political ideal and goal. Soft-authoritarian leaders claim to embody “the people”, whose interest they claim to represent by pitting the so defined majority community against their enemies within - such as cosmopolitan liberal rootless elites, stigmatized minorities, or migrants and refugees. Thus is a binary opposition constructed between “us and them”, on which Trump's or Orban's polarizing political strategy rests. With regressive campaigns such as “Make America great again” or “Take back control”, these nostalgic narratives represent backward-looking utopias.

It is important to clearly identify this pathology of our times in order to reject the extreme right's self-representation as the torchbearer of freedom (including, more recently, academic freedom). And it is not only important to diagnose the *symptoms* of soft authoritarianism, but also to understand its *causes* if we are to have any chance of combating it. Wendy Brown, the American political scientist, has pointed out that it was neoliberal anti-politics that prepared the ground for today's apathy and even hostility towards democratic political life. With its reliance on technocratic governance instead of participatory deliberation and accountability, neo-liberals and libertarians declared the state to be the problem. Their polemic against “the nanny state” denied the legitimacy of claims to social justice as pandering to “political correctness”.

As the rhetoric of Trump's election campaign blatantly illustrates, misogynistic, sexist and homophobic, racist and discriminatory slogans resonate strongly - especially with white men without college education, who feel threatened by women's empowerment and gender equality as endangering their masculinity and traditional patriarchal roles. When an American blogger's slogan aimed at women, “*Your Body - My Right*”, resonates positively on right wing social networks today, it points to deeply rooted sexism and misogyny. These anxieties, economic insecurity and feelings of loss of privilege are instrumentalized by right-wing populist politicians, who scapegoat self-confident women, migrants, or sexually, ethnically or religiously distinct minorities.

“When an American blogger’s slogan aimed at women, **“Your Body - My Right”**, resonates positively on right wing social networks today, it points to deeply rooted sexism and misogyny. These anxieties, economic insecurity and feelings of loss of privilege are instrumentalized by right-wing populist politicians, who scapegoat self-confident women, migrants, or sexually, ethnically or religiously distinct minorities.”

Another factor fueling the mobilization against women's rights and minority rights is the widespread demographic panic surrounding falling birth rates and ageing populations. Coupled with high levels of emigration from countries of eastern Europe, or increasing numbers of migrants in western Europe or the USA, these demographic trends result inevitably in changes in the *composition* of the population. Conservative parties as well as the extreme right have used these to spread fear of so-called “depopulation”, of losing the “demographic race” to minorities or non-Whites. They point to the decline of the so-called “genetic purity” of the nation, along with the disintegration of the institution of the nuclear family due to the irretrievable loss of patriarchal control over women, who are seen as not fulfilling their patriotic duty to reproduce the nation. The new rhetoric of “demographic security” is of a piece with the racist narrative of the “Great Replacement” which warns of an imminent attack on “Christian values” and civilization by (Muslim) refugees and migrants. These demographic fears in turn serve to legitimize pronatalist and anti-immigration measures along with anti-gender ideologies and attacks against LGBTQI rights. Conservative politicians all over Europe have contributed to the normalization of these right-wing populist discourses.

The aim of population policies implemented by states has always been to regulate both the size and the composition of their populations to create a politically desirable nation. Aggressive pronatalist policies that violate the hard-won reproductive rights and freedom of women are thus a centerpiece of soft-authoritarian rule: abortion has been criminalized in Poland and in various states in the USA. Plans are afoot to restrict access to contraception after Trump’s electoral victory. These restrictions hit poor women the hardest. In Hungary the legal recognition of trans and intersex peo-

ple was de facto abolished under the Orbán government and *gender studies* at public universities was replaced by *family studies*.

The crisis of democracy today lies not in its inability to hold regular, free elections, but in the subtle, gradual but systematic distortion of the modes and mechanisms of political representation. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that soft authoritarian practices of “lawfare” can be challenged in courts. This requires not only an independent judiciary but also free media. Moreover, it needs strong, well-resourced and broad-based national and transnational alliances of civil society activists and social movements to collectively resist the assault on the rights of women, minorities and migrants.

Democracy needs constant vigilance; and it also needs constant care. It must be nurtured, renewed and deepened through active citizen participation, and through innovative grassroots practices. For as Till van Rahden rightly emphasizes, democracy is a *way of life* that needs to be taught, experienced and practiced in the public sphere just as in the family. Conceptualizing democracy as a way of life also points to the ways in which the public and private are entangled here. In times when democracy has become a fragile, endangered way of life, it is not enough to focus on its institutional functioning and on elections alone. We would do well to consider what democracy *feels* like; how it could be practiced in various spheres and be deepened in ordinary everyday life at home and elsewhere.

Ultimately, it is up to each one of us as active, critical, vigilant citizens to raise our voices against the subtle changes and creeping transgressions in many still formal democracies to ensure a sustainable future for a vibrant liberal democracy. We must take responsibility and act in solidarity with those who are struggling for democratic rights, law and justice in their societies under very risky conditions in Iran, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Russia or Hong Kong.

“In times when democracy has become a fragile, endangered way of life, it is not enough to focus on its institutional functioning and on elections alone. We would do well to consider what democracy feels like; how it could be practiced in various spheres and be deepened in ordinary everyday life at home and elsewhere.”

In-between Law and Feminism: An Experience from the FIERCE Week

with Maria Francesca De Tullio

During the FIERCE week in Venice, held alongside the Transeuropa Festival, we had the chance to delve into thought-provoking discussions on feminism, activism, and social transformation.

As part of our Learn stream, **FIERCE** is a transnational initiative designed to foster dialogue, capacity-building, and collaboration around feminist practices and ideas. By merging academic and action-based research conducted by national and transnational research laboratories (composed by researchers and feminist groups), in the 8 European countries partnering with the project (France, Italy, Greece, Slovenia, Turkey, Denmark, Poland, Spain); FIERCE develops in-depth understanding and draws up a clear inventory of anti-gender movements and governments and their impact on the institutional arena on five key areas: Labour market, Health and reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights, Migration and Gender-based violence. These data are crucial for effective action!

Beyond research and comparative cross-sectional analysis of these movements, FIERCE also studies demands, strategies and political influence of feminist movements. Based on the results of its research and on a strong alliance with feminist and civil society organizations, Fierce develops and implements innovative pilot actions and projects that can reinvigorate democratic practices.

It is therefore on the strength of our expertise and our bottom-up, problem-focused and impact-driven approach, linking academic knowledge, policy development and democratic strategies.

The FIERCE week in Venice provided a safe context to explore these themes, blending the symbolic and historical significance of the city with forward-thinking feminist conversations. The program included workshops, discussions, and creative sessions, emphasizing the power of collective reflection and action.

In this interview, conducted by Noemi Pittalà from EA team, Maria Francesca De Tullio - member of the FIERCE project, postdoctoral researcher and activist from Naples, Italy - shares

her perspectives on feminism's diverse languages, the role of constitutional law in addressing gender inequality, and the critical importance of transnational alliances in tackling systemic challenges.

What connection do you see between this week, the FIERCE week, and Transeuropa? Why is it so important to include a project like this within a festival addressing the intersection of water and feminism?

I believe this connection is essential because feminism needs to express itself through diverse languages and approaches. FIERCE was an intense three-day period of discussions, bringing together people from academia, NGOs, and beyond. However, I think it's equally important to engage with the city of Venice itself. Relating with the city and its grassroots cultural spaces—like where we are now—represents an authentic feminist way of inhabiting and interacting with urban spaces.

Coming from an Italian background, I found it incredibly meaningful to be part of a safe, inclusive bubble like this one. It's equally inspiring, even though I personally won't have the opportunity to imagine exploring the city further as part of this experience. The intersection of different languages—academic, advocacy, and artistic—is incredibly valuable, as it fosters meaningful dialogue and collaboration.

Given your legal background, what do you think are the desirable intersections between international law and gender issues? What past intersections have been impactful, and what do you foresee for the future?

My background is rooted in constitutional law rather than international law. However, gender issues are inherently international. It's unthinkable to have gender rights upheld in Italy but not in Morocco, Ukraine, or other countries. Many constitutional charters and declarations of rights have played a pivotal role in affirming fundamental principles. Law is important because it provides the framework within which decisions are made, even when certain declarations aren't legally binding. Non-binding documents can still serve as

critical references for judges interpreting and applying rights, helping to advance protections.

One key challenge in constitutional law—also addressed in dedicated initiatives, like the women scholars-led blog [Le Costituzionaliste](#), where I contribute to the editorial board—is achieving substantive equality. It's one thing to declare that everyone is equal before the law, and quite another to realize it in practice. Recognizing and addressing systemic inequalities is essential. On this front, law still has significant work to do, particularly through interdisciplinary collaboration. For instance, I appreciated how today we discussed international law in dialogue with activists and from diverse disciplinary perspectives. Such exchanges are vital for bridging the gap between legal frameworks and real-world challenges, especially when addressing intersecting inequalities.

Regarding the discussions over these days, particularly the legal aspects, what practices or dialogues have stood out to you? What will you take back to Naples, your home context, and why are collective experiences like this important?

I'm not part of an organization explicitly dedicated to feminism. I'm an activist with [Ex Asilo Filangieri](#), a commons initiative in Naples that strives to be anti-sexist, anti-fascist, and anti-racist, even if it wasn't founded with feminism as its primary focus. Bringing feminist perspectives into spaces like this is a powerful way to foster learning and transformation. I'm also part of [Feministigation of Politics](#), a collective born from an alliance of municipalist initiatives working to make our movements less patriarchal.

For me, this experience has been profoundly enriching, particularly because of the variety of voices and perspectives involved. It's not just the international scope but also the range of viewpoints—from grassroots organi-

Everyday Democracy in Action: Towards Critical Change Through Youth Engagement

Jacc Griffiths



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zations addressing migration and domestic labor to groups advocating at the UN. Networks like these have always been crucial in my work to ensure that even spaces not initially feminist evolve into trans-feminist ones.

What do you think are the most urgent challenges feminism faces today? How can transnational actions help address these challenges?

It's challenging to identify where to start, as the list of urgent challenges is extensive. Today's interview takes place on a day marked by difficult news from the U.S. elections, which has added a layer of difficulty to our work and affected many of those participating here.

There are numerous critical issues to address, including how traditional gender issues in our movement—rooted in a long and rich history—can now expand to encompass the rights of queer individuals and broader social realities. For instance, ecofeminism is increasingly relevant in confronting the extractive nature of dominant systems. These systems exploit not only bodies, particularly those oppressed by patriarchy, but also natural resources. This exploitation is evident both in so-called natural environments and in urban contexts like Naples and Venice, where communities are fighting against gentrification and the displacement of residents.

For me, the international dimension has always been pivotal. It allows me to sustain and enrich this discourse, especially as someone who has chosen to engage in mixed spaces that interface with political movements and, at times, even party politics. These spaces often present challenges in maintaining a non-patriarchal approach. Engaging with experiences that share similar struggles or are even further along in their reflections helps me feel less isolated and more encouraged in these ongoing fights.

Could you focus more on potential solutions to the challenges we face, especially those you've observed this week?

Certainly. For instance, we've discussed how Italy's first woman prime minister has not advanced gender issues. On the contrary, there have been significant attacks on reproductive rights. While other countries are enshrining these rights, in Italy, abortion remains framed as a concession rather than a right, requiring proof of illness or risk, which represents a step backward.

This week has added a valuable international perspective. For those of us engaged in grassroots activism, this broadened outlook has been incredibly enriching. A recent roundtable on the relationship with institutions highlighted at least two critical issues: the appropriation of international platforms by far-right organizations and the need to create alliances between organizations with the resources and expertise to engage in international advocacy and grassroots movements.

Building bridges between these levels of activism is essential. Grassroots groups, even if they lack the inclination or resources to participate in high-level dialogues, bring invaluable perspectives and lived experiences. Strengthening these connections will be crucial for addressing the complex challenges feminism faces today.

Democracy in action is not confined to grand political arenas—it manifests in the smaller, often overlooked spaces of daily life. This is the principle driving European Alternatives' ongoing youth workshops as part of the Critical ChangeLab project, where young people will explore how rights intersect with everyday experiences in contexts like schools, families, workplaces, and youth organizations. In this project, we ask: where and how does everyday democracy take place; how do we reproduce (or not) democratic processes in contexts external to governmental institutions, such as at school, in the workplace, at home or amongst friends; and how can we make our voices heard even without institutional and social infrastructure to accompany them?

To find out, in the first participatory action research (PAR) cycle, the Critical ChangeLab research team at European Alternatives worked with young people working at the Maison de l'Europe in Paris. Over three sessions, we approached the subject of democracy in everyday life, and decided on ways in which democratic tools and processes could be implemented. Our researcher was joined by five participants aged 19-22. They shared a similar background as students of political science and international relations, working in either internship or civil service positions at the Maison de l'Europe, whose objective is to encourage open discussion of European projects and issues, to provide information and to promote active and inclusive citizenship through cultural activities and participatory conferences.

The participants agreed that making time and space for a discussion about their workplace allowed them to compare perspectives and to come up with new ideas and fresh approaches to their shared difficulties. It was their collective experience of working at the Maison de l'Europe which brought about the question of how to voice opinions and effect change in the workplace. To do this, we discussed over the course of several sessions what it means to be heard, and how we can proceed from democracy in discussion to democracy in action.

The outcome of this Critical ChangeLab was the co-creation of a charter defining rights and social duties for their workplace. The objective, decided by the participants, was to introduce this document to their colleagues as a means of vocalizing the need for mutual respect, organization and communication in the workplace. Having such an artefact is thus beneficial to them and the researchers alike, because it represents a product of our collaboration.

By engaging with youth participants, we intend on transforming our political activist expertise into youth-led discussion, context-relevant exercises and solution-driven processes throughout the labs. Involving primarily youth from underrepresented communities, we seek to underline the importance of making space for diverse voices and embodied experiences.



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Why focus on rights?

European Alternatives understands rights as both political constructs and social contracts shaped by lived experiences. Formal rights, protected by laws and conventions, often feel abstract to young people. The workshops will shift focus to everyday rights—those experienced through interactions at home, school, and work. Rights are not just words on a paper. They are performed and negotiated through lived-experience and social practice, and can vary greatly according to the context. Our reflection includes recognising the different ways in which rights take shape – how they have evolved and may evolve further, as well as their precariousness. In-line with the Critical ChangeLab Critical Literacies Framework, we engage with rights beyond 'human-human' relations, including 'human-nature' and 'human-technology'; these are necessary elements of a discussion of rights in modern society. Our desire is that youth start conceiving their rights as active, not passive, social as well as political, and subject to changing socio-political climates, for better or worse.

Creative exercises for life

The second PAR cycle labs aim to deepen participants' understanding of democratic practices, conflict resolution, and cultural deconstruction while fostering active citizenship. Through creative exercises and real-life examples, they will explore alternative democratic approaches, moving beyond conventional political frameworks. They will learn to identify conflicts, from social media issues to local disputes, and seek collective solutions. The young people involved in the process will engage in discussions about rights as both political constructs and everyday social contracts, understanding that rights are not fixed but evolve through personal and communal interactions. They are encouraged to reflect on how social norms and policies affect their daily lives and how they can advocate for change through participatory processes.

The process should allow them to rethink their rights as dynamic social agreements rather than static legal con-

structs and recognizing how democracy functions at various levels—from personal decisions like choosing a restaurant to community-led initiatives. Participants will explore perspectives on rights in contexts like schools, workplaces, and even human-nature relationships. They will explore how small-scale actions can drive meaningful societal change, developing practical tools for activism and long-term community engagement.

The labs also encourage young people to consider how decision-making processes operate in informal and formal settings and how localized actions can inspire broader societal change. For example, if a youth group successfully advocates for better school policies, how can their strategies be shared and adapted in other contexts? They learn how to extend their influence through peer networks, social campaigns, and community projects.

The way forward

Through these workshops, European Alternatives seeks to transform everyday encounters into spaces of democratic action. By engaging youth in critical, creative, and context-specific explorations of rights, the workshops will empower youth participants to become engaged, thoughtful citizens ready to shape the future through everyday democratic practices. By emphasizing collaborative inquiry, creative problem-solving, and contextual learning, the workshops provide tools for enacting change and foster a participatory culture that values diverse perspectives. As they explore the intersections of rights, democracy, and social responsibility, they will learn to navigate complex societal challenges, envision alternative futures, and create meaningful impact in both local and global contexts – becoming change-makers in the process.



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