Assembly Cookbook

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INDEX

A recipe is meant to inspire, but it is rarely necessary to follow it to the letter (unless you are making a soufflé). The same goes for this Cookbook, which aims to whet your appetite by offering different perspectives on how to put together a dish, combining ingredients to create a new alchemy. But these recipes should in no way be considered an exhaustive step-by-step guide whose sole purpose would be to list the tasks to be accomplished. On the contrary, these recipes and experiences are there to inspire you to create your own recipe, your own assembly.

But how? As in any recipe, there are recurring elements to consider. Who do you want to invite to your table? Academics, erudites, people who could be described as Mr./Mrs./They-Them Average, or perhaps artists, creative minds who have the ingenuity to see our interactions and the way we practice democracy on a daily basis from an angle that you and I would never have thought of?

There are also essential ingredients that you cannot do without: where does an assembly take place? In an enchanting setting such as a park in the heart of Palermo, in a public square that everyone is trying to reclaim such as in Florence (Italy), in a lively place covered with soft carpets nestled in the small town of Kuopio (Finland), or on the bustling banks of the Danube river in Budapest (Hungary)?

An assembly is, above all, a time shared by complete strangers who decide to pool their brainpower for a given period. This gathering combines political reflection, social conflict and creativity, which clash and intermingle to give rise to what every pro-democrat praises: compromise. An assembly is a way of formulating a common project without having to impose one's ideas by force and violence at the risk of being excluded from the discussion. Rather, it is the ability to listen to one another, to accept different points of view, to exchange one idea for another that is sometimes better suited to addressing a common problem, which will ultimately make it possible to put forward a shared vision of lasting change. An assembly is about viewing politics as a democratic endeavor, not only in form but also in essence. It is a new way of helping each other to build a new, fairer and more balanced world, where nuances take on meaning beyond polarisation.

So try out these assemblies, which have been led by inspired and inspiring people, all connected to the European Alternatives community. Draw on these recipes and adapt them to your own taste: get cooking!

Location
**PARIS
Les arches citoyennes**

Organisation
**Ophélie Masson,
European Alternatives**

Margins are the new center

Credits

Ophélie Masson

European Alternatives

TRANSEUROPA Les Marges en Feu Festival

As part of the Citidem project, an assembly was held within the TRANSEUROPA Festival under the theme Margins on Fire. The aim was to highlight communities in the margins and to emphasise common struggles and potential synergies for collective action among them.

Cooking Time

1 hour and 30 min.

Serving

- 50 people;

- Participants were coming from the local feminist network but also from organizations from all over Europe;

- Parallel to the festival, European Alternatives organized training for activists from France and abroad. They also came to the assembly.

credits: Claire Zaniolo

Steps

1. Preparation and recruitment
2. Building the agenda and choosing the topic
3. Facilitation
4. Communication
5. What happened on the day
6. Inspiring element

Preparation and recruitment

1 Participants from workshop

Building the agenda and choosing the topic

2
- The assembly reflected the outcomes of the processes that unfolded during the festival.
- Several workshops on health, parenthood, anti gender movements, media, and gender based violence were held during the event, and the assembly served as a concluding moment, bringing together the discussions and reflections developed across these workshops.

Facilitation

3
- Given the influence facilitators can have on the final content, it was decided that every group should include a staff member in this role. These facilitators had been involved in the organisation of the festival and the assemblies and were therefore familiar with the thought process guiding them. They provided participants with a point of contact when needed.
- The role of group ambassador was assigned to a participant.
- The assembly was transnational, with participants coming from a lot of different countries. The main language was English but there was a system of whispering translation in French and Ukrainian.

Communication

4

- The assembly took place during the festival and was supported by a dedicated website and social media communication.
- Although it was open to all, some individuals did not feel legitimate or entitled to take part if they weren't in the workshops. The process of the assembly made more sense if participants were part of the blocks that built the assembly. It was therefore important to make the assembly public and visible, which was possible during the concluding collective artistic performance.

What happened on the day

5

- The assembly took the form of a plenary session addressing themes previously explored in workshops.
- Participants worked in subgroups to develop creative strategies across three levels of action: European, national, and regional or local, emphasising interactions between these levels.
- Each subgroup nominated an ambassador before reconvening in plenary.
- The process followed a bottom up, civil society led approach. Elected officials were deliberately not invited to the assembly to put the purpose of a citizen assembly in the center. The assembly was meant to be a radical approach to democracy, in the content but also in the methodology.

What happened on the day

6

- The civic art segment with Anna Rispoli engaged participants in creating a slogan and carrying feminist banners. They moved into the courtyard of Les Arches, bringing the assembly's message into public view. The artist and participants then performed a slogan outside.
- This innovative artistic intervention contrasted with the perception of an Assembly as a formal procedure, showing that participation can be enjoyable, creative and empowering.

Restanza/Future: A Self-Narrated and Imaginary Assembly

Credits

Noemi Pittalà
(founder of the School of Restanza and Future)

Église Palermo

Fondazione Studio Rizoma

Between Land and Sea Festival

Nun Si Parti

Questa è la mia terra

Consulta Giovanile di Monreale

Sanacore Festival

Arci Link Monreale

This public assembly took place in Palermo during the Between Land and Sea festival, as part of the School of Restanza and Future, a pedagogical and political project exploring staying (restanza) as a collective, critical act in marginalised territories. The assembly format was chosen to open the School's research to the city and to ask, together with the public, what future we are imagining through the act of staying.

Ingredients

Cooking Time

Serving

WHERE
Piazza Magione, a large grassy area in a central public square.

MATERIALS
- 70 chairs arranged in a circle
- 2 microphones
- 3 flags made by students
- books and flyers
- post-its
- paper
- A shared playlist accompanied the welcome moment at the beginning of the assembly.

2 hours and 30 min. held in one afternoon session

credits: Peppe Tornetta

This recipe served 70 people: students of the School of Restanza and Future, artists, activists, researchers, and citizens from Palermo and Southern Italy. The assembly brought together a plural constellation of participants, including:

- students of the School of Restanza and Future (18-26), actively involved as facilitators and hosts;

- tutors of the School: artists, activists and researchers working on gender studies, migration, territorial justice, and cultural practices;
    - **Federica Pollari**, sicilian gender expert;
    - **Antonio Frederico Lasalvia**, brazilian architect, dancer and cultural organizer;
    - **Enza Macaluso**, sicilian researcher on migration from Sicily to abroad;
    - **Marta Vultaggio**, photographer and researcher;
    - **Ilaria Cascino**, independent curator and socio-cultural practitioner;
    - **Valentino Lomaglio**, activist and rapper;

- local and regional civil society organisations engaged on youth emigration, the right to stay, and community organising in Sicily;
    - **Nun Si Parti Association** on youth emigration from Sicily;
    - **Questa è La Mia Terra** on the right to stay and youth territorial justice in Sicily.

- cultural workers, educators, high school teachers and independent practitioners from Palermo and Southern Italy;

- citizens encountered in the public space, including young people, adults, and passers-by who joined the discussion.

Steps

Preparation and recruitment

1

Preparation unfolded through three workshops with the School's class: two sessions focused on facilitation, roles and responsibility-sharing, and one contact improvisation workshop led by Antonio Frederico Lasalvia, who later took part in the assembly and guided the final embodied moment. In parallel, students developed a shared visual identity for the three thematic groups (Disobedient Margins, Ecologies of Care, and Imaginary Narratives), supported by a tutor, strengthening their positioning and later materialised in the flags displayed during the assembly. Recruitment combined local networks, Studio Rizoma outreach, and door-knocking in neighbourhood spaces.

Facilitation

2

Facilitation was led mainly by the students of the School of Restanza and Future. This deliberate choice positioned young people in visible leadership roles, reinforcing responsibility, confidence, and care, while challenging habitual dynamics where their voices are often marginalised.

Communication

3

Communication relied on local circulation rather than mass outreach: neighbourhood networks, informal invitations, a shared breakfast with local organisations, and peer-to-peer spreading by students. Flyers supported face-to-face conversations rather than simple promotion.

Building the agenda and choosing the topic

4

The agenda emerged collectively from the School's pedagogical process and was refined following the first School assembly held in Monreale, near Palermo, within the Sanacore Festival. That initial assembly focused on the lack of spaces for young people to stay and gather. Building on this experience, the Palermo assembly expanded the reflection into three movements (leaving, staying, and future) linking personal trajectories, territorial conditions, and political imagination.

What happened on the day

5

- Participants were welcomed into the circle with the School of Restanza and Future playlist playing softly in the background, helping to set a shared emotional atmosphere. After a brief framing, researchers and tutors offered short contributions connected to their fields of work, opening the space to collective reflection.
- The assembly then unfolded in three movements: Partire (Leaving), Restare (Staying), and Futuro (Future). Following the plenary moments, participants split into small groups facilitated by students, each exploring the same questions through different lenses: Disobedient Margins, Ecologies of Care, and Imaginary Narratives.
- Three tables displayed flags and selected books produced and used during the School, inviting participants to stand, browse, and connect with the voices and references that inform the School's research. The groups shared their reflections back in plenary, weaving together personal stories, political analysis, and collective imagination.
- The assembly closed with a collective synthesis of emerging tensions, desires, and shared directions, followed by an embodied contact improvisation practice guided by Antonio Frederico Lasalvia, a final gesture grounding restanza not only in words, but in bodies, proximity, and relational presence.

Inspiring element

6

- The School's network expanded, as participants shared contacts and expressed a desire to stay involved in future collaborations.
- The assembly consolidated the School as a relational infrastructure, enabling new connections and institutional alliances to emerge.
- Following the assembly, the School was invited to engage with the Patto per Restare, a regional coordination for the right to stay in Sicily, strengthening the link between grassroots reflection and broader advocacy processes.
- A living oral archive on restanza in Palermo was generated through shared stories, reflections, and collective memory.
- Students strengthened their confidence and sense of responsibility, becoming a cohesive democratic micro-community capable of holding public space.
- The insights and questions raised during the assembly will inform the School's future programming and public interventions.

credits: Peppe Tornetta

A Piece of Space
106 hours assembly

Credits

Tea Andreoletti

Credits: the 106 assembly took part in the context of the ANTI Contemporary Art Festival, in co-creation with Konepaja community members.

Set designed by Jaana Kurttila and graphic design by Francesco Dipierro.

A Piece of Space: 106 hours assembly was a co-production with Periferico Festival Modena. It was co-funded by the Creative Europe programme, the Finnish National Agency of Education and the City of Kuopio. It was in cooperation with Elävä Säätiö.

In September 2025, during the ANTI Contemporary Art Festival in Kuopio, Finland, A Piece of Space occupied Konepaja, a soon to be lost public space in the city. The former factory, likely to be converted into apartments, hosted a five day assembly bringing together local residents and associations who usually use the site. The assembly centred on the value of public spaces and on the need to relearn how to be together outside traditional sites of consumption.

Ingredients

WHERE
Konepaja, an old abandoned factory transformed in a public space which the municipality plans to convert in apartments

MATERIALS
Beds, banners, carpets, a tent sauna and everything needed to live for 5 days

Serving

- First day: 70 participants, 12 slept
- Second day: 65 participants, 18 slept
- Third day: 70 participants, 20 slept
- Fourth day: 105 participants, 20 slept

- Special guests: Kuopio for Palestine proposed a film screening, Extinction Rebellion Kuopio made a banner making workshop, Pyöräpajaa group hosted a bike repair workshop, Nora Sayyad and Gáddjá Haarla Pieski hosted an anti-colonial conversation

Cooking Time

106 hours: 5 days and 4 nights

Steps

1. Preparation and recruitment
2. Facilitation
3. Communication
4. Building the agenda and choosing the topic
5. What happened on the day
6. Inspiring element

Preparation and recruitment

1 The goal was to temporarily occupy a public space and transform it into a home, so that it can host a temporary assembly. Local embeddedness was built over six months through monthly artistic actions and collective activities. A locally rooted partner ensured continuity beyond the event. Practical needs were gradually prepared, including cooking tools, sleeping places and furniture. Recruitment remained open to spontaneous participants passing by and choosing to stay.

Facilitation

2 Facilitation focused on creating conditions rather than outcomes. Informal moments such as meals and breaks were treated as core assembly time. Simple coexistence rules (Create a generous space, Care and listen, Exercise how to be together) structured the assembly life. Participants were encouraged to co host and take responsibility for welcoming newcomers.

Communication

3 A shared chat with the Konepaja community documented the process and allowed open participation. A website presented a draft agenda and managed sleepover registration with limited capacity. Visual banners marked the space publicly. During the assembly a physical agenda replaced the digital one.

Building the agenda and choosing the topic

4

The agenda was collectively produced and continuously revised. Participants added activities day by day according to what they wished to bring or experience (talks, screening, etc). Blank spaces were deliberately preserved to allow spontaneous discussions. Agreement on the agenda emerged through shared presence rather than formal decision making.
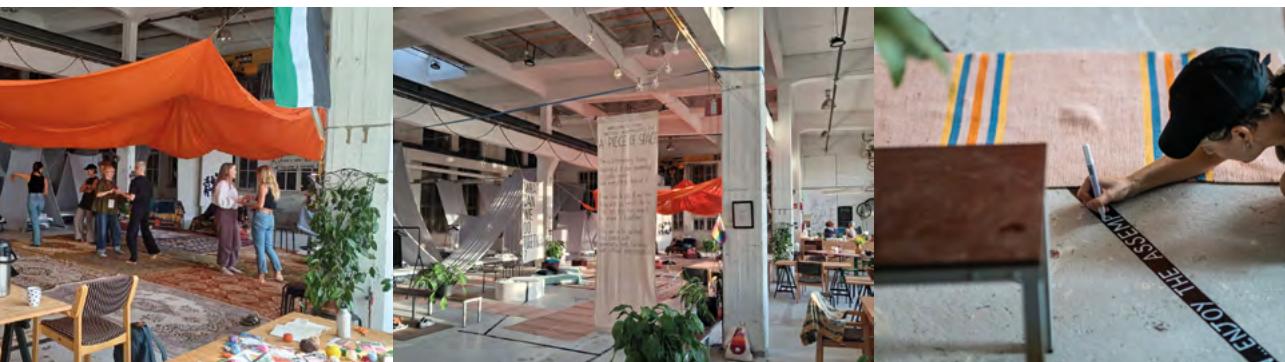
What happened on the day

5

The space functioned as a temporary home for over one hundred hours. Participants cooked, ate, rested and discussed together. Resources were shared through reciprocity. Everybody was bringing something: there was an apple tree nearby, someone brought jam, someone was working in a restaurant and bringing the leftovers… Some people brought their skills to the agenda, dancing class, meditation, playing the piano, making flower wreaths or setting up a sauna tent. Moments of friction became learning opportunities for coexistence. On the final day a collective report was shared publicly.

Insipiring element

6

The assembly drew on intersectional feminist collective practices and hack meeting formats. The co-hosting and co-caring also meant to encourage people to both take space and to give space. The physical space we had also helped this: it was cozy and looked like a home, rather than an empty room with chairs, which helps to gain agency.

Building Bridges Against Walls, Mediterranean Assembly

This assembly was the first step of the BridgEU project: a EU-supported Town Twinning, marking the 35th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Through assemblies, participants reflected on contemporary "walls" still dividing Europe and its cities. Lecce's assembly - taking place on 5th and 6th December 2024- focused on migrations and the Mediterranean Sea, a new boundless wall of water, to be reconverted into a bridge of common civilization.

Ingredients

Cooking Time

Serving

WHERE

- In the first day, the assembly was held in Officine Cantelmo, a former industry building - now managed by NGOs as an event space- nearby the historical city center of Lecce
- In the second day, events were
- organized in the major Bernardini Library-Convitto Palmieri, which also hosts conferences and exhibitions, the archives of Carmelo Bene and of Eugenio Barba/Odin Teatret, dedicated to the history of experimental theatre
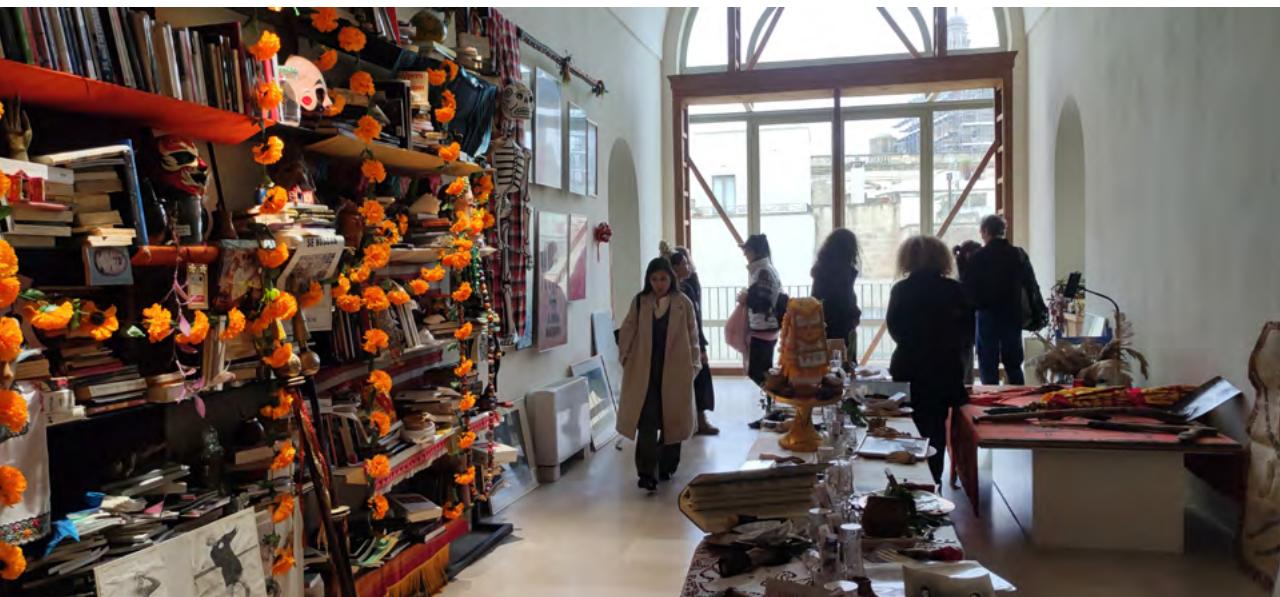
2 intense days – more precisely: one whole afternoon and evening + a whole morning.

- 150 participants between the two days
- Participants were citizens and residents from several European countries -most of them traveling from Greece, Germany and Poland- including Erasmus students of the University of Salento and migrants: they took part in both deliberative and festive activities.
- Participants included institutional representatives, notably the Mayor of Muğla Metropolitan Municipality (**Ahmet Aras**) and the representative of the Mayor of Berlin (**Janne Grote**), together with the Mayor of Lecce (**Adriana Poli Bortone**) and the Mayors of some towns from Salento: Martano (**Fabio Tarantino**, also VicePresident of Lecce Province), Melpignano (**Valentina Avvantaggiato**), Tiggiano (**Giacomo Cazzato**). The Mayors of Bari (**Vito Leccese**) and Brindisi (**Giuseppe Marchionna**) and the Vice Mayor of Aradeo (**Georgia Tramacere**) - unable to be present in person, sent messages to the assembly.
- Professors and experts from Italy (**Susanna Cafaro**, **Guglielmo Forges Davanzati**, **Claudia Morini**, **Adriana Schiedi**), Croatia (**Iris Goldner Lang**),Turkey (**Şule Bucak**) and Egypt (**Mohamed Shokry**) were invited to give inputs on the topic of migrations.
- European NGOs, local civil society organizations and the organizing team co-created the event.

Steps

Preparation and recruitment

1

- The event was organized as a transnational assembly bringing together people from across Europe - travel costs were reimbursed.
- Accommodation was offered to participants through an agreement with a youth hostel, which was entirely rented for the event.
- It was ensured that both participants and speakers were diverse and with a proper gender balance. Local NGOs working with welcoming migrants invited some of them to take part to the assembly
- The assembly was possible, as the whole Building Bridges project, thanks also to the previous arrangements made with the former Mayors of the City of Lecce (**Gaetano Salvemini**) and of the City of Bari (**Antonio De Caro**) that supported with official letters - along with the Mayor of Avdera (**George Tsitiridis**)- the application for the CERV Town Twinning project.
- The assembly was also prepared as a hybrid, allowing a professor to intervene via remote connection.
- The method of the assembly was inspired to the long experience and theorization by the Citizens Take Over Europe coalition about transnational civic assemblies and participatory-deliberative democracy mechanisms (including the European Citizens Assembly Blueprint: https://citizenstakeover.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Blueprint-for-a-European-Citizens-Assembly_-pdf.docx.pdf).

Facilitation

2

- The working groups were facilitated by doctoral researchers from the University of Salento, particularly from the collaborators of the Jean Monnet Chair in Eu Law.
- They supported the discussion process and helped each group to shape its recommendations.
- After the in person event, participants from the different deliberative thematic tables met twice online to refine and finalize the recommendations, facilitated by the organizers.

Communication

3

"Passaparola" through mailing lists, news letters, chats, social networks (FB event: https://www.facebook.com/events/730940735907987) + press release

Building the agenda and choosing the topic

4

Following conversations between *BridgEU* project partners and local Ngos, the focus of the assembly was set on good practices for welcoming migrants, in one hand, and, in the other, on how to avoid forced migration–including for economic reasons–from the Mediterranean area, including Southern Italy, as well as other fragile areas of Europe, such as Poland, so as to allow people to truly choose their own path in life, including through a *restanza* ("staying") that is not synonymous with renunciation.

Sharing the invitation

5

The invitation was circulated through newsletters and social networks of the partner NGOs - both at the European and local level- networks of activists, and student groups of the University of Salento.
An invitation was circulated also through the informal chats of the European Citizens Panels of the Conference on the Future of Europe …and two "veteran citizens" participated in the Lecce Assembly!

What happened on the day

6

- The programme opened with a general introduction by the organizers and a plenary session in which experts (professors, researchers) and institutional representatives provided in depth inputs - in three consecutive panels from the stage of the theater hall of the Officine, also with the help of slides
- Reversing the scheme, participants were invited to get on stage to offer their own inputs -and questions- on the basis of their personal experiences.
- Then the participants gathered in five different thematic deliberative tables, using a basic sortition-like system: the participants counted themselves from 1 to 5, in order to assign themselves to the respective deliberative table, which was set up simply by arranging the chairs in a circle in the different corners and rooms of the large space of the Officine.
- The event also included artistic interventions: "Emperor Giustiniano" - an interactive creation by cinema director Berardo Carboni- "disrupted" at some point the assembly with an intervention via remote connection, questioning the current limits of European civilization in the face of the epochal phenomenon of migration; the local cartoonist Davide Coi created drawings during the debates and presented the result at the end of the day underlining how the ongoing discussions inspired his work.
- The day concluded with a "festa mediterranea", with local food, music and artistic performances offered by participants with artivist background: for instance, Joulia Strauss performed using an ancient-likeGreek lyra.
- The second day, after an initial scientific input by professors, it was the time for a dialogue betweenmayors of towns from Salento, the mayor of Muğla and representatives of local NGOs, movements and trade unions to share best practices in welcoming migrants, integration and on "restanza". Participants appreciated the opportunity to discuss directly with them and present the first results of the deliberative tables discussions.
- A final cultural segment took place in the Bernardini Library where the participants visited the archives of

Eugenio Barba/Odin Teatret and the ones of Carmelo Bene. There Lorenzo Paladini and Franco Ungaro from AMA - Accademia Mediterranea dell'Attore (Mediterranean Actors Academy) performed a reading of a text by Carmelo Bene about the Mediterranean. Participants were then asked if they would like to perform using the microphone provided: a traditional shamanic song, initially sung by Joulia and then joined in by everyone present, brought the two-day gathering to a perfect close.

- Finally, participants who had not yet left to return home took part -before to have a final aperitif and dinner together- in a free walking tour to visit the city's attractions, including the archaeological section of the Castromediano Museum. Here they also had the unique opportunity to take part in the rehearsal of the participative dance theater performance "Promethean Chain" led by Greek choreographer Apostolia Papadamaki.

Sharing the invitation

7

- Despite a very limited budget, the objective to organize an assembly relevant for the city was maintained thanks to strong commitment and generosity from the partner NGOs.
- This assembly was conceived as an experimental prototype of a future Mediterranean Citizens Assembly

Outcome

8

- The goal of the assembly was to have a set of recommendations on migrants welcoming for local authorities and EU institutions (included in the final *BridgEU Political Recommendations* report: https://studiorizoma.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/BB_FinalReport.pdf)
- Some of these recommendations will also become part of "Xenia", the popular initiative law on migrants reception, which is under construction through a series of bottom-up deliberative assemblies throughout Italy (https://www.editorialedomani.it/politica/europa/contro-la-retorica-anti-

migranti-di-meloni-una-legge-popolare-sullaccoglienza-i6amad5o)

- The Mayor of Muğla offered to the organizers to host in Turkey a new step of the prototypical Mediterranean Assembly. Moreover, before to leave went to Lecce municipality - accompanied by assembly organizers- to have an official bilateral meeting with the Mayor of Lecce to discuss potential future partnerships between the two cities …for the first time "twinned", thanks to the assembly!
- A new traveling community started with the Lecce assembly, creating lasting transnational friendships consolidated through the following assemblies of the BridgEU project in Berlin, Thessaloniki and Warsaw/Białowieża Forest - and beyond.

Location
BUDAPEST
Turbine central center

Organisation
Csenge Schneider-Lonhart
Fluctuation Festival

Rivers Assembly

Drawing created at the assembly by cartoonist Davide Coi

Credits

Csenge Schneider-Lonhart

Fluctuation Festival
TASZ
Valyo
European Alternatives

The assembly addressed how citizens can reclaim Budapest's Danube riverbanks. Although the river is beautiful, access is limited due to the riverside motorway and pedestrian-unfriendly banks. Residents struggle to use the river for leisure, yet many wish to swim, especially as the summers are getting hotter. The key question is how the riverfront could be redesigned to allow public enjoyment.

Ingredients

Cooking Time

2 hours

WHERE

At Turbine, a cultural venue in Budapest with a large concert hall and smaller rooms for meetings and workshops. It was part of the Fluctuation Festival programme. Originally, the assembly was meant to take place outdoors on the banks of the Danube, but big storms and floods forced the organisers to relocate everything indoors at the last minute.

Serving

- 25 participants
- Partnership with the Human Right organization TASZ who co-hosted and co-organized the assembly.
- Guests:
  - Member of the municipality
  - Organization **Valyo** (from Város for city and Folyó for river), which works on creating simple riverside infrastructures to make them accessible
  - Researcher Thomas Scheele, from Vibe-Lab, who focuses on transforming rivers into cultural and recreational spaces

Steps

1. Preparation and recruitment
2. Building the agenda and choosing the topic
3. Sharing the invitation
4. What happened on the day
5. Inspiring element

Preparation and recruitment

1

As the assembly was part of the Fluctuation festival, the participants were recruited among people who attended the festival.

Building the agenda and choosing the topic

2

The topic was chosen because it was relevant to the local community. It is the only city where an assembly was organized on this topic.

Building the agenda and choosing the topic

3

The assembly was part of a music festival, so people attracted by the music were also brought into a more political and social discussion moment.

What happened on the day

4

- The assembly was bilingual (hungarian and english)
- First, the members of the municipality gave a small speech, followed by Valyo
- The participants split in three small groups and had to answer questions: *What are your aspirations for the river? What activities are currently possible along the river? How does limited access affect you? What are your demands towards the municipality? Who could be potential allies to achieve what they want?*
- The 3 small groups had to come up with a concrete idea for the river banks. Some proposed to implement a small swimming pool in the Danube made from the water and canoes, kayak and

- waterbikes rented by the municipality.
- The person from the municipality stayed the whole time and was in the small group. He received some confrontational questions.
- TASZ summarized the recommandations and demands of the assembly in a document and sent it to the municipality.

Inspiring element

5

The 3 small groups had to come up with a concrete idea for the river banks. Some proposed to implement a small swimming pool in the Danube made from the water, other that the municipality could rent canoes, kayak and waterbikes for cheap or even free.

Conversation between 2 cooks

Ophélie Masson, *civil society cook* and
Paul Blokker, *academic cook*

Ophélie: I thought that it would be very valuable to have your perspective in your cookbook because you have both the academic position but also an anchor in practice. Do you have any questions so far?

Paul: Well, if I may complexify immediately, it seems to me that it depends on whom you're cooking for and the occasion right? So, maybe in the summer you have a different type of recipe than in winter, for instance. I guess that's also the idea of a cookbook, maybe to have recipes for different objectives, for different organizers, for different participants.

Ophélie: Yeah. And there are the recipes that are based on lived experiences. And then there are recipes that are maybe a little bit more fancy. The kind of recipes for assemblies that you should be striving for.

Ingredients

WHERE

Ophélie: Are there some environments that are a bit more favorable for an assembly to take place?

Paul: It's already a difficult question. Any assembly will host a diverse group of people that will be comfortable in different settings. So maybe the best response would be to try to find a context, an environment, a setting that makes the largest part of people happy. For instance, if you look at the European citizens panels, it's always a very formalistic institutional environment and I'm not entirely sure that that is necessarily helpful. It's very important that you make people feel comfortable, cherished and empowered, so they don't feel like they're part of this very complex thing. But again what kind of assembly are we talking about? Who is the organizer? It's different for assemblies organized by civil society and institutions.

Ophélie: And at the same time, we could envisage a system that has both: those very formal moments and formal spaces, but also the grassroot spaces.

Paul: Yeah, and I can also imagine that civil societies assemblies tend to be a bit anarchic, and friendly. But that can also be problematic. When I was at your festival, when we did the assembly, there were many different groups in one room, so you had more noises, and distractions. I think it's very important to think about what would be the best intermediate situation. At the European Citizen's panel, in the sub-panels, participants were in the sterile European Commission's room. It didn't feel like a very happy situation. But you would have the ideal silence, focus, lack of distraction, and they were perfect for translation. But then again, I think it's very important to be able to feel comfortable.

Ophélie: Because if they are too impressed, it also sterilises the thoughts. The thought process cannot flow if you're in a fear response.

Paul: There could be much more thinking about the environment that facilitates creative processes. But there is no blueprint because that's also different for different people.

Serving

Ophélie: And because in many settings, you were invited as the expert: What is your perspective on the role for you of the experts in an assembly? Is your goal to leverage the differences of knowledge?

Paul: It's extremely difficult. I think one of the problems with experts is that when they think they're right, they will impose it. And academics are super well-trained in making convincing arguments. But sometimes, facts are important. At the Conference on the Future of Europe in Florence, I was sitting on a panel as an expert observer and was not supposed to intervene. The panel was about media and corporate ownership, and I knew that in that same month, the Commission was debating the Media Act, but no one mentioned it. I found this problematic because it meant that two days of discussion were happening without being properly informed. I felt they should have been more careful - perhaps by making sure there were always two contrasting experts present, whatever that might mean.

Ophélie: That's interesting, because then from an institutional perspective on assemblies, there is a fear of experts, and of the fear of their disturbance of the process.

Paul: I think it's a kind of fabricated laboratory type of thinking about deliberation. The ideal is that deliberative assemblies are a laboratory that is completely disattached from the outside world, that supposedly helps it to be neutral. But that can't be possible. We are all collective beings. So you will never be able to entirely bracket individuals into a kind of laboratory type situation. You just need to carefully make sure that when input is provided, it's at least pluralistic and balanced, even if it can't be neutral.

Cooking Time

Ophélie: What is the ideal duration of an assembly?

Paul: Well, I think it should at least be a number of appointments, a minimum of three. Three weekends in which you would have at least the Saturday dedicated to enlarged deliberation. Most assemblies will have a topic that is pretty complex.

Ophélie: So there's a possibility for the development of the thought process.

Paul: Exactly. And also there, in my view, you should have the same people talking about the same stuff. In Ireland, there were 10 or more appointments over a year's time. So once a month. It becomes very intense for them.

Ophélie: And then you need some, like, public service support of some kind to be able to make up for the time that you're spending doing that.

Paul: And it's very costly in terms of organisation. But it allows you to really seriously address the topic from different angles.

Steps

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Ophélie: When it comes to the selection of participants, there are different schools of thought out there. In your experience, what is the main model that is both relevant for deliberation and at the same time realistically implementable for organisations out there?

Paul: That's a good question. The academic standard of random selection is completely out of reach for ordinary civil society because it's so extremely expensive to do that. And then I'm not necessarily convinced that that is such a wonderful method because I've never really understood what the necessary benefit is. The claim is, of course, that you create a kind of mini public, as they say, which reflects wider society. But it seems to me that most of the time that doesn't really work because even through random selection you're not easily getting people who are further away from politics, further away from the public sphere. You could do some kind of "aggressive" random selection, if you want to call it that. That might be better, but I'm still not convinced that it's necessary. I think the core should be the diversity, but how random that should necessarily be, I don't know. What is to be avoided, of course, is that you speak only to your own people, to people who think like you. So you would need to start sampling from ideological positions. I think you could create a kind of weak unique list of characteristics, geographic, social

demographic, education, and political positions, for instance, and then try to select on that.

FACILITATION

Paul: In Athens, [during the Democratic Odyssey], I was a facilitator. I felt that some participants contributed genuinely beautiful and valuable ideas, but for organisational reasons and because of the way the process was designed, it did not work properly. Some participants were experts, and they ended up hijacking the debate, moving it away from the original questions. The role of experts is closely linked to that of facilitators, as both have a strong impact on the final recommendations. This experience showed me that facilitators for citizens' assemblies need to be properly trained. I guess if you were a really, really well-trained facilitator, maybe you would have been able to turn things around.

Ophélie: Yeah, the role of the expert goes hand in hand with the role of the facilitator. Because at the end of the day, the experience and the role of the facilitator has so much impact on the final recommendations and the final product of an assembly. So, you do wonder: should a facilitator, even a very well-experienced facilitator, be trained specifically for a citizen assembly format?

Paul: I do think it doesn't work to have a facilitator who's actually also not somehow, an expert on the topic that is being debated. When I was at the mobility panel, the facilitator didn't know anything. People would ask things, and then the facilitator would give the factual answer, which was completely wrong. It helps a lot if you have an expert that is able to push the discussion into a useful direction. But of course, then you also have the problem of when somebody oversteps. Maybe you should also have rotating facilitators. Because the risk is, if the facilitator is not an expert, you really risk winding up with senseless deliberation. I think it's important that you try to get some kind of recommendation that most people will see as a surplus value. Because otherwise, you start wondering, what was I doing there for two hours, or two days, or for a year?

Ophélie: Maybe we can say something about the diversity that should be expected in the facilitation team. Because, for instance, you mentioned it's important to have experts who are able to bring counter arguments to each other. Maybe it should be the same amongst facilitators?

Paul: I realised that there are people who have been studying this for decades. But it seems to me, at least the assemblies I've been part of in different places, there is still a huge problem. That is, some people are more articulate, outspoken, comfortable in speaking in public, and the others are not. And there's always the case that somebody hijacks the floor, or it's a couple of people. I haven't seen any facilitator ultimately being able to stop that. Maybe that's even impossible. But again, I think it would be important that you also create a situation in which people who are not used to speaking in public can still somehow contribute. Maybe you could also have people writing things and then delivering it later.

Ophélie: Or there could be that written contribution in between the assembly moments. And we could maybe consider the idea of training for participants before the process starts. Also, something that is quite done in grassroots training, and youth training, is to set some ground rules at the beginning. So the main organiser would come with a set of ground rules, and then say: "now we're going to create a list together", and then everyone has to give their oral agreement that they are committing to respect those ground rules for the duration of the process. So maybe this is something that should also be fully integrated into assembly.

Paul: And also give a couple of minutes per intervention. And another thing there that I noticed that in Athens is the translating part. I mean, there we had the whisperers. But it was very difficult, to what extent is the person who is being whispered to still involved. But that's very complex.

WHAT HAPPENED ON THE DAY?
Format of the assembly

Ophélie: To continue talking about the democratic separation of spaces, we often see the technique in assemblies of going from plenary settings to subgroup settings. What is your perspective on that, from what you've seen?

Paul: I think it makes sense, but it depends on the plenary. You need to prepare the assembly in order to maximize the appetite for people to speak about what they listened to in the sub-groups. The trick is to know your audience very well, which with randomly selected people is not so easy. The plenary should help to figure out what kind of people are there and how we can speak to them directly.

Civic art and deliberation

Ophélie: There's a tool that we have been using in assemblies, as you have seen as well, which is civic arts and the use of arts and culture into assemblies in a more or less successful way. I wanted to ask your perspective on this, because we know that for some participants, engaging in a less formal setting, or being invited to deliberate through civic arts, feels more accessible and relatable, creating new opportunities for participation.

Paul: I've got a bipolar opinion on that. On the one hand, I'm deeply interested in artistic expression in politics. I think this is a really under-analysed field. But then, and that's the other side of me, when I see so-called civic arts in assemblies, I often find it infantilising. It becomes a bit of a primary school type of situation. If this is a means of making people collaborate it's perfect. You should have artist facilitators that then push this into real creativity. You need experts, in this case, artists, to make it work. To make it something that really transcends the everyday, non-artistic skills that most people have. Because learning to express yourself is also something that is complex. And most people won't do this on a day-to-day basis. But to me, the question always is: to what extent is this conducive towards deeper mutual understanding? And sometimes, it seems to me, it doesn't reach that goal. In Athens, for instance, the theatrical, that was very inspiring.

Ophélie: But at the same time, should we expect that everyone is an artist?

Paul: Of course, art is not only about self-expression. But it's a very interesting way of doing so. And so helping people to do that is important, I think. And so maybe this is exactly also a kind of expertise that might perhaps be thought about a little bit more. I think the classical approach seems to me, you get a giant piece of paper, and from different sides, people start scribbling on it. Which may also be conducive to creative processes, but I'm not sure.

Ophélie: Yeah, but it is then this form of empowerment of participants through the arts. And so it's also that people are not just expected to produce art, but they are also guided in making it.

Paul: So you need an experienced artist facilitator. I do think one of its core purposes may be this kind of group vibes, community building.

Ophélie: If you do want people to develop a form of trust amongst each other so that they feel more comfortable into the deliberation, more like formal deliberation, maybe the artivism and the civic arts part of it is not an end in itself. But it's just a means for trust building to improve the quality of the deliberation.

INSPIRING MOMENTS

Ophélie: I would like to end with a more open question. Looking back at your experiences, is there a moment within an assembly process that struck you as particularly brilliant or inspiring, an instant that made you think something genuinely important was happening here?

Paul: That is a very good question. And a difficult one. In a sense, these moments are not rare. I am always amazed when a discussion really takes off, when people begin to understand one another, and when together they manage to lift the conversation to a higher level. That's what we had in Athens. That, to me, is the most beautiful part about deliberation. But it's also the most dangerous part. You can't know this beforehand. It is like cooking with ingredients you don't know in advance. You only discover it while cooking. If we think of democracy as a kitchen, then the cookbook represents different ways of organising deliberation. There are many cookbooks. The question is how each one links to the others, and to the rest of the kitchen. Personally, I feel more at ease with assemblies organised by civil society. There is a spontaneity, a passion there that is often missing in institutional contexts. It is like working with a completely different cookbook.

Ophélie: I see. And yet, institutions could still learn from what civil society does, even if they have to operate within certain rules.

Paul: The functionality of an assembly depends a lot on whether it is top down or bottom up. Bottom up assemblies can help keep the public sphere alive, which is increasingly difficult. That is precisely why this cookbook is so important!

Location
**FLORENCE
Italy**

Organisation
**Virginia Fiume,
activists' coordination**

Palestinian Resistance Encampment

Credits

Virginia Fiume

European University Institute

Patrizia Nanz

GKN

Non una di Meno

Zero Calcare

grassroots Palestinian groups

university professors

local shopkeepers

This recipe reflects the perspective of one person (Virginia) and is based on the Toscana Aperta Symposium Report 2024.

*Two phases: preparation assemblies, and then the assemblies taking place during the actual encampment occupation.
The recipe focuses on the two weeks of encampment, organised as a full 24-hour cycle of decision-making, combining logistics assemblies and political assemblies.*

Ingredients

- 1 occupied and renamed square, during the first sit-in that launched the occupation
- An open-air space, with a comfortable corner to stay, gather and rest
- 1 reclaimed statue, covered with signs and messages
- A nearby space dedicated to performative actions
- 1 gazebo as a shared and visible structure
- Sounds: bombing sirens, percussion, collective noise
- Visual elements: red paint, keffiyeh, visible marks
- Palestinian poetry read and shared collectively
- A collective artistic action built together
- Art students and people from a theatre school
- Grassroots Palestinian groups offering logistical support
- University professors participating individually
- Local shopkeepers from the square providing food and listening to the assemblies
- 1 coordination holding the groups together
- A concluding performance with percussion ("La Mulga", from Argentina)
- 1 die-in in the square
- Bodies participating, even when words are difficult to speak

Cooking Time

**Very variable from one day to the next.
The encampment functioned in 24-hour cycles,
with continuous occupation of the square and
plenary assembly moments changing in duration
depending on the day.**

Serving

This recipe serves up to 150 people at its peak.
The use of a microphone allowed people passing by or staying at the margins of the square to hear the discussions and join the assembly.

Invited guests
- Patrizia Nanz, President of the European University Institute
- Trade union members from GKN
- Activists from Non una di Meno
- Cultural figures such as Zero Calcare

Steps

1. Preparation and recruitment
2. Facilitation
3. Communication
4. Building the agenda and choosing the topic
5. Sharing the invitation
6. What happened on the day
7. Inspiring element

Preparation and recruitment

1

The process took into consideration best practices brought by participants from past experiences. A key choice was to separate logistics assemblies (mainly for those sleeping in the camp) from political assemblies held in the evening, which were designed to be accessible to city residents. At least one daily assembly was intentionally open to the people of Florence.

Facilitation

2

Assemblies were structured through a shared agenda (ordre du jour), rotating chairing, and dedicated time slots for specific topics. Horizontality was central: respect for different political cultures, individual and collective stories, and the absence of a leader were considered essential. Time and care were prioritised to allow reflection and continuity across days.

Communication

3

Communication tools included flyers for the launch of the occupation, the creation of an Instagram account, and a whiteboard used as an info point. A "passeggiata rumorosa" took place daily at 12pm: a walk through the streets of Florence functioning as a protest, a visibility action, and an open invitation to join the occupation at the square.

Building the agenda and choosing the topic

4

Agenda-building was a collaborative process. People could propose topics, workshops and seminars over time. Queer groups proposed workshops on pinkwashing. Seminars with guests were organised. This process relied on individual mobilisation of professors based on academic freedom and integrity, rather than institutional support.

Sharing the invitation

5

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What happened on the day(s)

6

Alongside assemblies, performative actions took place: a collective performance involving sound of bombing sirens, blood paint, keffiyeh, Palestinian poetry, and percussions ("La Mulga" from Argentina). Art students and theatre school participants were coordinated by Virginia, forming a civic arts action. A die-in was organised in the square, offering an embodied way of participating for those uncomfortable with speaking during assemblies.

Inspiring element

7

The assembly was part of a transnational wave of mobilisation. While it did not stop the genocide, it succeeded in stopping university agreements and contributed to longer-term agenda-setting. Assemblies continued after the occupation ended, and similar actions were replicated across Italy, influencing later large-scale strike days and functioning as advocacy and empowerment tools.

Location
ATHENS, Greece
FLORENCE, Italy
VIENNA, Austria

Organisation
Niccolò Milanese
European Alternatives

Democratic Odyssey

Credits

Niccolò Milanese

Democratic Odyssey is a journey involving many civil society groups, universities and democracy practitioners. It is steered by European Alternatives, European University Institute and Missions Publiques

The three assemblies (in Athens, Florence and Vienna) were part of Democratic Odyssey, a long-term journey across the continent to join people into a permanent nomadic assembly for Europe. These assemblies are transnational, translocal, interconnected, transparent, and empowering.

Ingredients

A network of facilitators of assemblies wanting to experiment and do something new.
People randomly chosen across Europe, including people with and without European citizenship, and people from EU and non-EU countries
Artists, creatives and communicators creating non-discursive forms of deliberation

Cooking Time

3 times over 3 days

Serving

Number of participants: 350
Number of facilitators: 20
Official Attending:

George Papandreou, Member of Greek Parliament and Former Prime Minister, **Dimitri Keridis**, member of Greek Parliament, **Nicolas Farantouris** (Member of the European Parliament) and **Christina Kefalogianni**, deputy governor of the Attica region (5 million people); and **Nikos Chrysogelos**, vice-mayor of Athens for climate, governance and social economy
Dario Nardella, Former Mayor of Florence and member of European Parliament, **Laura Sparavigna**, advisor of the city of Florence, **Cristina Scaletti**, Mayor of Fiesole, **Vladimir Susha**, representing the European Commission

Steps

1. Preparation and recruitment
2. Facilitation
3. Communication
4. Building the agenda and choosing the topic
5. Sharing the invitation
6. What happened on the day
7. Inspiring element

Preparation and recruitment

1

People were chosen randomly across Europe to participate in each meeting, and others were chosen randomly in each city the assembly was meeting in, ensuring a mix of natives, European citizens, and third country nationals of different profiles. Civl society representatives were also chosen randomly to take part. In each city there was a mini-festival to reach a wider public, and in Vienna there was a highlight on activists from Serbia and Rojava to make connections with other democratic struggles.

Facilitation

2

The multilingual facilitation mixed discussion groups and world-cafes with participative theatre, role play scenarios, creating living statutes to represent future situations, moments of voting and ranking proposals, and plenty of embodied movement and interaction to visualise opinions and feelings.

Communication

3

The assembly became well known in each city where it met because of involvement of city government and local partners, the festival and public events around each meeting, and by using highly symbolic spaces in each city: the Pnyx in Athens where assemblies met thousands of years ago, Palazzo Vecchio in Florence where citizens governors met, a historic radio building in Vienna.

Building the agenda and choosing the topic

4

We involved a large group of citizens, experts in facilitation and others in designing a wide-topic in advance of the assembly starting: how should Europe deal with future crises? This topic could then be appropriated, refined and redefined by the participants in the assembly, making it relevant to each city and each person taking part.

Sharing the invitation

5

To include politicians it was important to be adaptable in the timings where we could welcome them into the assembly to fit their schedules, whilst also ensuring that we only hosted them at moments which would be useful for our work.

What happened on the day

6

In each city there was an interesting relation between local and transnational experience when it comes to crisis: in Athens the recent train crashes were put in relation with floods, fires and armed conflict in other parts of Europe, in Florence postive experiences of using technology for democracy were compared with experiences of fake news and manipulation, in Vienna the experience of so many people being unable to vote put in relation with the experiences of migrants across Europe.

Inspiring element

7

Each time politicians were invited to the assembly, they were invited to respond, not to welcome: first they had to watch the assembly at work work, listen to outcomes and recommendations, and witness some of the more artistic and embodied forms of expression. We could see this experience surprised them, made them more open and curious and ready to listen and be thoughtful in their responses.

ATHENS

FLORENCE

credits: Elisa Massara

credits: Elisa Massara

Notes

Notes