



8. Considering a Venue

Margerita Pulè

search perspective. Using such natural settings may be inevitable when working with control groups, for example.

The spaces that will eventually come to be associated with the project can be chosen in order to make participants feel supported, but it can also encourage communities to take ownership of venues that they did not previously feel they had access to. They can also be chosen to instil a sense of pride in an area, or to change perceptions about a particular space. The venue may also be related to the content or nature of the project – for example, it may be a building with a specific meaning in the community, or it may be a disputed space, with histories which the project is attempting to address.

The community museum project Naqsam il-MUŻA (Share the Muse) (2016 - 2018) invited communities to work with the entire national collection at the Museum of Fine Arts in Malta. Participants were invited to the archival and storage areas of the museum, allowing them access to a national institution, and demystifying some of the curatorial process. The project then worked with the same participants to curate work in their own communities, thus creating a link between the institution and everyday life.
www.valletta2018.org/cultural-programme/naqsam-il-muza

Below is a consideration of some familiar or unfamiliar venues, and what they can bring to a socially-engaged project, both during the creative process or a final presentation.

Familiar and unfamiliar venues

Where participants meet to collaborate and create can make a big difference to how they feel about a project, and how comfortable they are with taking part. Sometimes a project must use simply whatever spaces or studios are available, but it may be worth putting more thought into an element that has the potential to determine the character of the project. In field experiments, a researcher's decision to study a group within a natural setting is considered an integral component of the study, because the venue's connections with real-world occurrences and behaviour are perceived as being more valid from a re-

- **Familiar venues** - For example, a school hall, local community space, or avenue where the community already meets regularly can encourage a close community bond, and will mean that the artist, rather than the participants, is in an unfamiliar space. On the other hand, an already familiar space may come with its own particular meaning and history (positive or negative). A familiar space will not have a sense of 'difference' or novelty, which may make the project more interesting to some participants.

The digitisation project Magna Żmien (Time-machine) (2017 - present) works with communities to digitise analogue photographs, slides, sound and audio-visual recordings. Their presentations and community meetings are generally held in venues that have meaning for the communities they are working with, for example a local bar or community space.
www.magnazmien.com

- **Unfamiliar spaces** - Unused spaces within the community may provide an interesting background to a project. For example, a neglected open space or garden or a forgotten historical site may come back to life, and acquire new meaning through fresh use.

- **Public space** - Parks, open spaces, common land, even car-parks may encourage participants to think of public spaces as belonging to the community, rather than to private entities.

The Windrose Project, carried out in Malta, (2014 - 2016) worked with four fishing and

farming communities to create large-scale wind-vanes in each locality, created after numerous discussions and workshops with participants. Each wind-vane has now become significant in its own location, acting as a marker of the venue, and a reminder of the project.
www.windroseproject.com

- **Formal institutions** - A national museum or concert hall may seem intimidating and unwelcoming, but inviting participants to enter such a venue - possibly for the first time - can instil a new sense of self-value and belonging.

The Inclusive Memory project in Rome (2018) fostered the construction of a shared and collective social memory through an inclusive system within a museum context. While acknowledging the strong links between museums and their surroundings, the project worked to include those in the region who may have been excluded from its cultural life, and thus unable to contribute to its collective memory. The museum was seen as an educational or instructive site, but also as a context for social integration, allowing for collaborations, and skills such as critical thinking, communication and cooperation.
www.host.uniroma3.it/progetti/inclusivememory/en/index.html

- **In the wild** - Practitioners are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits of rural and natural environments to health and well-being - something which communities may not always have regular access to.

*The research project Erämaa opettaa: Kehollisesti ympäristön, taiteen ja yhteisön maisemis-
sa (Wilderness teaches: Bodily in landscapes
of environment, art and community) (2004)
examined the Tunturin Taidepaja (Fell Art Work-
shops) taking place in Northern Finland, which
offered a learning and working environment in
the field of art education to unemployed young
people at risk of social alienation. The project
took the learner's phenomenal, physical and
sensory relationship with the environment as
the starting point for all learning - the multisen-
sory physical work done in Tunturin Taidepaja
was closely tied in to the surrounding environ-
ment and culture. Hiltunen, 2004*

- **Emotional ties** – Does the venue have any special significance to participants? Could this have a negative effect on participation? Is more information needed to address this?

Practical considerations

Some practical elements will need to be considered when choosing a venue, and the following questions may need to be asked:

- **Accessibility** – is the venue accessible to all of the project's participants?
- **Health & safety** – is the venue safe for all, and do any changes need to be made to make it safe? Is help needed in ensuring participants' safety?
- **Permits & permission** – are any permits needed from local authorities, and has permission been granted from the owner of the space?