

THE CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION MOVEMENT (CTM) PROJECT
KNOWLEDGE ROUNDTABLE #1

Representation, is there such a thing?

Thursday, October 5, 2023, 10:00 am - 12:30 pm.

Venue: Class Room, Fabrika Tbilisi.

TEH Camp Meeting 96 'Reboot'

Report by:

Israel Aloni - CTM project researcher

TEH Camp Meeting 96 'Reboot' took place between Thursday, October 5, 2023, and Sunday, October 8, 2023 and hosted by Fabrika Tbilisi, Georgia.

About the TEH Camp Meeting, text from marketing materials which were published pre-meeting:

After the turbulent years we have experienced on political, economic, ecological, and social fronts, we believe it is essential to take a pause, gather together, and engage in introspection and collective dialogue on how we can REBOOT.

On Knowledge Roundtable:

Information on Representation, is there such a thing?

Challenges of representation and expression of underrepresented communities. The Cultural Transformation Movement (CTM) project is set to transform cultural organizations by implementing strategies and methodologies of cultural management and creation processes that are developed with the full engagement of under-represented communities. It involves four CoC - centers of change, each working with AoC - artist/agent of change.

Acknowledging the complexed ecosystem in which cultural and artistic actors operate, whilst there is a great need for specificity and particularity, the notion of singular example or a representing entity places a lot of weight on the project's centers and artists/agents.

This roundtable - workshop looks at the notion of representation. Are there advantages in being invited to the table? Are there disadvantages in being “the one”? The CTM project uses the terminology “underrepresented communities” to refer to those who are too often overlooked. How much representation can indeed remedy underrepresentation?

Speaker: Israel Aloni.

On-site facilitator: Ceyda Berk-Söderblom, Senior Project Manager and Researcher, CTMP Lead at TEH.

Results and conclusions:

This session was hybrid; the facilitator, Israel Aloni, and several additional participants joined it online, while most gathered in a shared physical space. It began with a short presentation by Aloni about the notion of representation and the weight placed on the shoulders of those who expected to be doing the representation. After that, Aloni invited the participants to raise questions and concerns regarding representation. The group then split into smaller clusters, in which the participants discussed particular questions or concerns from those articulated in the open space.

At the end of the small group dialogue, each group presented reflections and ideas gathered from their conversations. The session ended with a discussion in the encompassing context with all the participants.

This roundtable session, which took place at the start of the meeting in Tbilisi, offered a lens through which the participants could examine their experiences and processes throughout the TEH meeting.

It was an excellent opportunity to introduce the Cultural Transformation Movement project to the created TEH community and offer a multidirectional transmission of information and ideas. The CTM project partners attested to having gained fruitful insight from the collective conversation in this session.

We often think of representation as an aspirational concept. However, when we unpack some of the problems with the notion of individuals representing a

community, we learn that we must readjust our perspective to interact with those who are too often underrepresented.

Ideas/reflections shared by the participants:

The following ideas were mentioned and discussed in the session as valuable dimensions and nuances within work on heterogeneity and representation:

- Sense of ownership - who owns a project's merit and content? How can we ensure that those who work on the project possess a sense of ownership?
- The private vs the public - when is a private experience becoming relevant to the public? When is it OK to utilize a personal experience in a public domain?
- Language has an undeniable and persisting grip on how we envisage the world and can present many challenges in attempting to make something comprehensible.
- Public support and state funding come with many expectations and demands. It is the role of the custodians of the project to ensure its authenticity and sincerity within the required framework.
- Rightwing politics are getting stronger in more places in Europe, so the arts and culture must champion a delicate balancing act between working with and working against society.
- Where is the public money coming from, and what is this money affiliated with? Public money does not necessarily mean that the money comes with a distinct care for the public.
- Where do we want to stand within the European context? We are working in the European context and must acknowledge the privileges and constraints that come with it.
- What are the challenges facing Europe in the coming years? How we work with inclusion and representation within the CTM project might need to change and shift as the project evolves to remain fresh and relevant to the constantly changing world.
- Working with "underrepresented communities" can bring challenges around notions of appropriation and maltreatment of cultural artifacts and communal identities.
- We ought to employ methodical practices that address the importance of location - in homogenized communities, there is little diversity.
- Diversification of the team needs to be an essential action in the process. Heterogenizing the team would most likely result in the proliferation of approaches and practices.