

THE CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION MOVEMENT (CTM) PROJECT KNOWLEDGE ROUNDTABLE #2

Community as both the origin of and the destination for our work

Thursday, October 11, 2024, 09:00 am - 12:00 pm.

Venue: Restaurant, Beach Venue, Epanomi.

TEH Camp Meeting 98 'Argatia'

Report by:

Israel Aloni - CTM project researcher

TEH Camp Meeting 96 'Argatia' took place between Thursday, October 10, 2024, and Sunday, October 13, 2024 and hosted by ΦΙΕ in art, Greece.

Text about TEH Camp Meeting in Epanomi, taken from pre-meeting marketing materials:

The word Argatia is rooted in the Pontic language, a group of ancient Greek dialects spoken by indigenous communities along the southern Black Sea since Ionian colonization. It signifies the collective support given by an entire village when one person is in need. Honoring the essence of Argatia, our meeting (the TEH meeting in Epanomi) will emphasize this cornerstone of communal support, creating a platform to celebrate and rejuvenate the community spirit and communal living. By bridging the past with the present through the intergenerational transmission of practices, we aim to share experiences in communal bonding, artistic freedom, and environmental awareness.

Context

A knowledge roundtable is a method we chose in the [Cultural Transformation Movement project](#). We committed to facilitate an annual roundtable in order to broaden the field in which our work resonates as well as inform our work within the project about the reality and circumstances of our peers and colleagues around the world.

In our application to Creative Europe we described the knowledge roundtable as contexts in which the partners in the Cultural Transformation Movement project and me (as the researcher in the project) can share our gradually accumulated insight

from the project with the international arts and culture sector as well as receive reflection and input from professionals who are not part of the project.

The roundtable in Epanomi focuses on community and the relations we as artists and cultural workers form-reform-deform. This is corresponding directly to the current phase of the Cultural Transformation Movement project, which focuses on creating the necessary ties between the artists, the partner organisations, and the communities they have chosen to work with in the project.

Abstract

In preparation for the Roundtable in Epanomi, I proposed the following text for the description of the session in the TEH Camp program:

How to reconcile the needs and demands of a connection to community on one hand and connection to organization/institution on the other?

What are the challenges and the advantages artists face in projects where they have clear intentions to work with communities but are also bound to the requests of the producing and funding bodies?

Through dynamic conversation and exchange both in smaller groups and all together, we will try to articulate some recommendations for equitable and just ways to work with communities and reduce elements of tokenism and cultural extractivism.

Conversation starters

The Roundtable took place at a venue, formerly used as a restaurant, touching the sandy beach of Epanomi. About 30 people attended this session. There was a bit of movement in and out throughout the session and therefore the number of participants is not finite.

In the beginning all the participants sat in a large circle which covered the majority of the room.

I opened the roundtable with a contribution. I introduced myself, described my situatedness and the orientation from which I was facilitating this session. It was important for me to offer the participants a clear insight to the context in which the conversation is being had and how it is part of a larger movement within the [Cultural Transformation Movement Hub](#), within TEH and, perhaps more specifically, within

the Cultural Transformation Movement project which is co-funded by the European Union.

I mentioned how working with communities in artistic projects raises numerous epistemological and ethical questions. I defined epistemology in a rather clinical way by referring to its etymological lineage from the word *Epistēmē* (Greek) meaning knowledge - referring to intellectual knowledge.

I also brought in a definition of Epistemology by Miriam von Schantz - a Deleuzian scholar of media and spectatorship at Konstfack - University of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm which I encountered recently: *“What does it do to understand things in one way or to understand them in another way.”*

The notion that epistemology does things in the world was particularly significant in the roundtable context, in relation to how the way we know things makes things—brings things into being in the world. Thus, in a project such as Cultural Transformation Movement, where there is an intention to move, to do, to maneuver, to bring along the change and to create things, it is necessary to reflect on how we know what we know.

In regards to Ethics, I referred to the words of Eleonora Fabião as she refers to Spinoza in her paper *Performance and theater: poetics and politics of the contemporary scene*, she writes:

“The body is not being understood in terms of form, but of interactive forces, as a complex relationship between various velocities, as an elaborate interaction between infinite particles... Spinoza proposes that a body is not separable from its relations with the world since it is exactly a relational entity.”

(translation from Portuguese - Maikon K)

With the reference to Fabião I invited the participants to employ ethics of relationality and thinking about and through the ways in which we relate. What is the relationality of what we perceive as our body and how do these relations, be it to ourselves or to others—which, in our work, might be embodied by what we deem as a community—bring something into being?

For the purpose of the roundtable, the participants were invited to think of body also as body of work, a body in the work or the body of a gesture.

As the title of this session suggests, community can be both the origin and the destination of our work. Things can start within or from the community. Alternatively,

a community might form and gather around the work at a later stage, when the work already has a magnetizing power to summon a community around it.

After my contribution, I introduced an exercise of questions asking, to stimulate the collective-mind in the room. All the participants, still sitting in a large circle, were invited to pose questions in relation to the roundtable's theme, the abstract, my aforementioned contribution and from their own experience of working with communities in any way.

A collection of 60 questions was formed. Then the questions were grouped in four sub-collections, organized by motivations or themes:

1. Identity and authorship.

Examples of related questions: How do we identify a community? How do we identify within a community? How does identity bring people to be part of a community? How does a community bring people to feel that they possess a certain identity?

How do we categorize people into a group? Who has the authority and/or mandate to categorize whom? What are the practical implications of grouping or collective in accordance to categories? What are the relations between the individual and the group? What are the economies of responsibility in a context of community?

2. Structure of community.

Examples of related questions: How does power come into play in the process of becoming a community? How does a community negotiate power dynamics within it? What are the relations of power between a community and those who are not part of it? In what way choreographies of hierarchies are relevant for community formation as well as for its operation in the world? How do we define the contour of a community? Who gets to say who is in and who is out? How does a community do things? How does a community make decisions about itself and about the world around it?

3. Contribution and action.

Examples of related questions: Do community members have any liability for the community? What are the duties and responsibilities of the parts of the community? What is an active membership in a community like? Does being part of a community require any labor? What are the economies of reciprocity which are at play within a

context of community? What are the protective as well as the potentially compromising attributes of being part of a community?

4. Context.

Examples of related questions: When/where does a community start and when/where does it end? What are the geographic orientations of a community? Do communities depend on a sense of location? In what way is transformation part of the vitality of communities? What are possible adhesives which can potentially hold a community together?

Ideas/reflections shared by the participants

After a short break, the participants gathered in four groups. Each group spent time unpacking one of the themes.

Then we all reconvened into one large circle again and shared the content which came up in each group. To concretise the utterances into guiding prompts and feasible futures, I asked the participants to offer their contributions in the form of instructions.

Things we can do

These are the instructions with which we concluded the roundtable session:

- (Identity - belonging) if you invite communities / collaborative communities, give it more time, think about the resources and time engagement when you work with communities.
- Be aware of multiple identities - it might connect you to multiple communities but it might also disconnect you (because you might not be enough).
- When including specific communities you might need to take others out of the space.
- In order to protect, it is important to create ground rules.
- It is important to have patience towards the other.
- In order to have sustainable practices, it cannot come from good will, but more established as ground rules and common practice.
- Create safer space. Remember that safer space for someone might not be safer for another.
- As an organizer, beware of your power. It makes a difference if you offer the space rather than someone approaching you with the concept.

- Be aware who sets the rules. The one who sets the rules has the power.
- Give voice to unspoken rules in order to dismantle them.
- Be patient. Make space for unlearning.
- It is not fast enough so don't rush.
- If you take a name, a name is a token.
- If you want to reach people, ask who wants to be reached and who do they want to be reached by?
- Commune with communities communing with communities of communities.
- Communicate.
- Try to exclude behaviors not people.
- Allow identities to change and intersect.
- Stay curious.
- Do not take communities out of context. Community is always in relation to the inside and the outside.
- Let go of general rules. Revisit your ideas and make new decisions.
- To avoid hierarchical structures, be patient, offer time.
- Organize yourself by other means to your CV.
- Remove expectations.
- Evaluate the work and evaluate the time.
- Release yourself from the notion of needing more monetary resources to embody more power.
- Just join!
- Find out what your resistance against the term community is.
- Use the term communities.
- Fight against unification.
- Do not try to become an "insider" to ensure that there are no "outsiders".
- Be aware of the context when you talk about labor and duty. Social-economic context is important.
- Include those who have to live with the decision already in the decision making process.
- Get out of your bubble.
- Be curious.
- Negotiate rules.
- Invest time. In-depth conversation before and after.
- Identities as process and know that there are multiple.
- Diversify the representation in the organization and communication for better understanding.
- Try different formats. Shift the form.
- Rest.