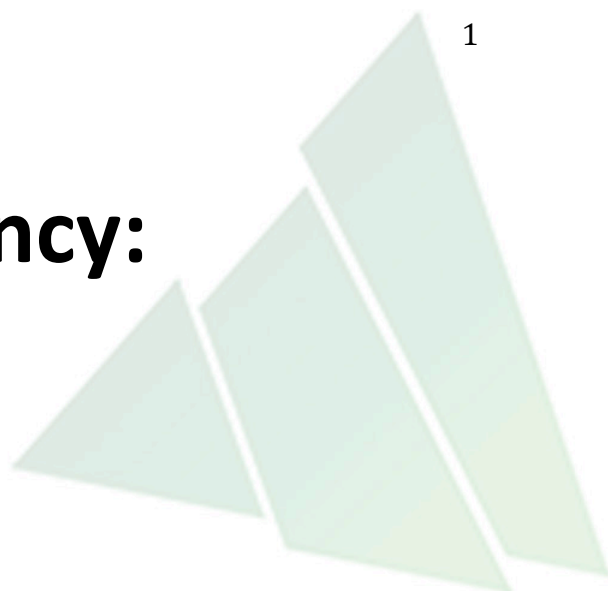


# Warsaw Residency: Project Report



**The European Commission support for this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which only reflects the views of its authors and the commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein**



The Polish residency was located in Młynów, a sub district of the Wola district of Warsaw – the capital city of Poland. The residency was hosted by local Partnership “Młynów na Woli” (Mill in the Wola district). The population of Wola is estimated to be about 140,000. Wola was a typical industrial area of the city before and during World War II. Nowadays, Wola is developing rapidly and at the same time it remains a district of many contrasts.

The Partnership “Młynów na Woli” is an initiative involving local government institutions, non-government organisations such as e.g. Polish Scouting Association Warsaw Wola, Social Welfare Centre Wola District Capital City Warsaw, Association Office of Social Initiatives “BORIS”, Association of Education and Social Animation Praga Północ, Primary School No. 166 “Z’ wirki and Wigury”, Common Children’s Cultural Centre “S’ wietliki”, Municipality Office of the Wola District in Warsaw and residents of the district. The aim of the Partnership is work for the benefit of the residents of the area between Okopowa, Leszno, Tyszkiewicza and Młynarska streets and to provide them with support in dealing with neighbourhood problems and starting new local initiatives.

The artist chosen for the residency by the “Młyn na Woli” Partnership and the Institute of Polish Culture was Nina Scholz from the Plattformer collective.

Plattformer is a British based, not-for-profit group, founded by Carl Richardson, Tim Mitchell and Nina Scholz. It is an umbrella organisation of artists, architects and designer makers who have been working together on projects in the public realm since 2004. In the past they have worked with the London Borough Councils of Hackney and Islington, the Building Exploratory, Breeze Landscape Architects, Remapp Landscape Architects, St Mary Magdalene Academy and the general public.

### **Appointment process for artist**

The appointment process for an artist started from meetings of the representatives of Polish partner (Institute of Polish Culture) with the Partnership Młyn Na Woli focused on discussions on the specifics of the area based on the diagnosis undertaken before by the local institutions. We have discussed together,

what are the characteristics, needs and problems of local community. Then we elaborated together the content of the open call including the description of the area, host organisation and expectations of the artist. The established deadline for sending the applications was 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2015. There were 24 artists applying. The applications were shared via drop box with the whole Partnership and the project's partners in UK and Spain. The UK partners provided their feedback, which was treated as a reference point for the rest part of the shortlisting. On 27<sup>th</sup> of February the Partnership gathered together with the representative of the Polish partner in order to shortlist the application. All of the proposals were carefully discussed and then three artists were chosen for the next part of the application process: The interview was organised on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March. The jury consisted on one representative of the Institute of Polish Culture, three representatives of the Partnership and one representative of the Staffordshire University. After talking via Skype to each of applicants and long discussion together the jury chose Nina Scholz (Plattformer) to be the residency artist.

Plattformer is a group founded by Carl Richardson, Tim Mitchell and Nina Scholz. As a not-for-profit organisation of artists, architects and designer makers they have been working together on projects in the public realm since 2004. In the past they worked with the London Borough Councils of Hackney and Islington, the Building Exploratory, Breeze Landscape Architects, Remapp Landscape Architects, St Mary Magdalene Academy and the general public. Plattformer proposed that Nina would work as the lead artist on the project but for periods of the residency she would be joined by fellow Plattformer member Tim Mitchell who would assist with the residency and support the team. The selection panel supported this proposal and believed it would strengthen the project.

Afterwards the Polish and British project partners stayed in touch with the chosen artist to discuss the logistic of her stay as well as the financial and organisational details. The artist signed the agreement with the Staffordshire University.

## Młyn Na Woli: Residency Evaluation and Outcomes

Nina Scholz started her residency with a meeting of different groups of residents gathered in different clubs or activity centres and random people met on the streets. She, together with Tim Mitchell, another member of the Plattform, were collecting the local knowledge from different age groups: children from Kids' Club "Świetliki", adults from the Gibalskiego street and seniors from the "Gold autumn" club. The constant themes of these different talks focused on the understanding and use of the public space, the history and stereotypes of this part of Wola and also the circumstances that influence the civic engagement and cooperation of the residents. Starting from these initial interactions, Plattform focused its activities aimed at creating friendly, comfortable spaces, that can be "public" in real sense and conditions; providing circumstances for meetings of different kind of residents; looking for conditions for visibility and hear-ability of the local, individual and varied opinions and stories.

One of the important topics for the Plattform was how to challenge people's stereotypical view of the neighbourhood. During the first few weeks of the Residency they initiated a few meetings with residents and passers by focused on the construction of an installation that resembled stairs, but in fact it demanded an action from the user in order to be defined. The stairs were used by the residents to sit, to go up and see the yard from a different viewpoint and even to practice acrobatics and to take photos.

The next part of the residency was even more focused on the Gibalskiego/Okopowa Yard and was aimed at common reflection on the imaginary inside and outside space of this area. The inside space being the Yard itself and the outside referring to the place the residents were born, where they spend free time or which provoke strong memories. The Plattform collected different stories told about the outside spaces by the residents. They build a special installation called *Stacja nadawcza* (Transmission station), on which they attached the hand-written local stories in order to make them visible within the space of the yard. While building the construction and collecting the stories they also asked the most important question connected with future action and change is: What is possible

here?

During all different discussions in the yard, where some people expressed their expectations towards both local government and their neighbours, it occurred that, what is possible is a deal, is a barter, where everybody is giving something on the conditions that there will be an exchange. The logic of a “barter”, were close to the concepts of the Everyday Urbanism, served as a theme for one of the next actions in the yard called “something for something”. The team of the Residency proposed the residents a participation in the exchange aimed at organising the common feast in the yard. They offered different kind of plants, which residents can take home on the condition that they will promise to bring something or somebody for the feast: food, a chair, an idea for activity, another plant or a neighbour. More than 50 exchanges happen in the yard and in the next week it occurred that *Podwórkówka* (the yard feast) was full of participating people, the table was full of food and many people enjoyed the fact that everybody took a part in organising one of the first common gatherings in this yard. The constructions built by the Plattform were important parts of many different activities organised together with residents and members of the Partnership.

The Partnership declared that the residency was quite different from their previous initiatives, because they used to focus on concrete aims, problems that need a solution. During the Residency more important was to be together, to be on permanent basis in the yard, to get to know more residents, talk to them, listen to their needs and ideas, organise something together. The important lesson is that it is worth to find time for this kind of relationship, for the integration for spending time in direct contact with residents. The residency made the Partners collaborate more with each other and thanks to that they recognised their own potential and the potential of the fact that they are so various – represent different professions and way of work. The complementarity of the Partnership and the intensity of cooperation was a very important, new experience. The new thing that the Partnership get to know thanks to the art residency is that it is worth looking for activities that have a potential to bring together residents of different ages and with different backgrounds, whereas in their previous initiatives they succeeded rather in

working with homogeneous groups. It was also a big lesson for both the University and Partnership that it is possible to cross the borders of sectors and disciplines.

⇒ **Evaluation of the Community Practitioner role. How were they appointed, what they did, how effective was the role?**

The community practitioner was the member of the Association of Education and Social Animation Praga Północ (Grupa Pedagogiki i Animacji Społecznej – GPAS) – one of the Partners of the Partnership Młyn na Woli. The GPAS was appointed because their experience was the most relevant for the project. As street workers they are involved in social work dedicated to disadvantaged kids, they are focused on working with unprivileged young people in cooperation with artists from different fields. The responsibility of community practitioners as local experts was to introduce the artist to local community, consult the relevance of some artistic concepts for people and to assist the artist in different activities connected with engaging the residents. The crucial role of the community practitioner was to be a member of the project team, taking part in weekly meetings and elaborating together new concepts. The role of the practitioner was very effective, the GPAS helped very much in adapting many ideas to the local reality, in making links between artist and residents, in sharing the local knowledge and professional experience. Without such a permanent, inspiring assistance the residency would not work so well.

⇒ **Evaluation of the residency**

The evaluation was undertaken by the host organisation of the residency – Młyn na Woli Partnership during two discussions summarising the project, in which took part various members of local organisations, some residents and the Residency team.

Also the project was evaluated by a researcher, who was not directly involved in the whole process of the project (see the appendix). This part of evaluation took a form of individual interviews with different people engaged in the residency: artist, trainee, community practitioners, residents, and members of the Partnership.

Another tool used by the evaluator was observation both of the collected documentation and on the space of the yard and the way people treat the



construction done during the residencies. Important source of information was also the activity of different people on the Facebook page of the Partnership.

### **Effectiveness**

- According to the different participants, crucial meaning for the effectiveness of residency was the way the artist was chosen, the participatory character of the shortlisting and interviewing influenced the engagement of the local Partnership and its responsibility for the whole process. This participatory character also has changed the usual way of organising socio-artistic projects, where most often an artist is brought by the project to the certain community or area, without consulting the residents and having no chance to question the project. Here the effectiveness was bigger, since the residency was a kind of mutual choice of the artist and the community
- In the beginning the organisers experienced a certain distance and doubt about the Partnership, connected with the problematic character of the area and low possibility of community engagement, participation and cooperation. Thanks to the long process of cooperation, the approach of artist and the reaction of the residents, it occurred that it was possible
- The artists experienced some challenges focusing on a certain group and placing their activity in one location, since they have been meeting many interesting people in many places. Together with the Partnership and the team they located all the actions in one yard, but at the same time tried to involve other people in some small actions or to simply be in touch with them. The community groups valued this effort and reported they experienced a different, redefined role of artist in community.
- The residency required special effort to incorporate the creative activities into the daily routine of the yard. Since everything happened in the open space, the aspect of weather became quite crucial, also the working hours, the habits of spending the free time and weekends. It was quite an achievement to find good time for different groups: local children club, young people, working and retired residents.
- Some of the members of the Partnership and residents declared a small disappointment with the level of activity of artists and admitted that they expected

more dynamic, more creative presence although at the same time they link it with the artist's strategy to remain only mediators in the whole process

- Working in partnership within the team – together with community practitioners, trainee and researcher was a vital component in the projects success. It allowed the team to share each one's experience, elaborate together the ideas and activities and to share the responsibilities

### **Impact**

\* The residency reached a large number of people from a wide range of groups: children, youth, seniors, residents and people with learning disabilities. The number of residents involved in the final phase on the Gibalskiego/Okopowa yard was bigger than the Partnership managed to collect ever. In the preparation of local, Yard's meeting more than 60 people took part.

- The residency was very much dependent and appreciative of the support offered by different members of the Partnership, who represented different public and non-government institutions. A close relationship emerged between the creative team and staff and the feedback reports this was mutually beneficial. Not only did it help practically but also both parties fed back that it helped them value the impact of their work and feel more motivated to continue. Members of the Partnership reported that it inspired them to do new things, to elaborate new events in a way that was done by the residency team and to continue regular activities in the same location.
- This led to Partnership becoming more motivated to use the arts and creative activities as engagements tools to help them re engage with the local community.
- The feedback from residents was very positive and their participation in final event was surprising, they came in a great number and co-organised the whole event. Great feedback from them was also shared by the Facebook page.
- Participants reported that the residency activities made them redefine the concept of artist and art as some terms not connected with and not relevant for their lives. They valued in a positive way that there was no feeling of elite or hierarchy.
- Feedback from residents and Partnership indicated that residents engaged in



these activities for much longer periods of time than earlier initiatives of the Partnership.

- The members of the partnership reported that they recognise the residency as one of the most important experience in their vocational career, because it has totally changed their way of thinking about projects with local communities, about the role of social workers, cultural practitioners, sharing the decisions and responsibility with non-professional residents etc.

### **Civic engagement**

- Simple act of asking residents about the local community and having the opportunity to talk to an artist from overseas made them more reflective about their local community. Many discussions and brainstorming emerged in the yard. It occurred that many people want to change the state of the public space, are ready to be involved and engage.
- The function of the residency was that it uncovered local potential of cooperation, skills, engagement, self-organisation, sharing which the residents and the Partnership were not aware of.
- Very important was the redefinition of the understanding and use of the yard that happened during the residency. From almost abandoned, neglected space it started to become a common, public space, that can be changed together, co-created by residents. The members of the partnership reported that the residency showed the residents that they can think about the shared surrounding in a different way as about the space for their activity
- The big test of civic engagement was the final event of the residency, which depended on participation of residents. They treated it as their own party, co-created the programme of it, prepared the space, brought a lot of food, stayed together for a long time.
- During the residency, among the residents one of them was gathering votes for the bottom-up initiative of building a playground for children in the district. Thanks to the great number of voting people the project was chosen for participatory budget in the Wola district and will be realised next year.

## ⇒ **Sustainability**

- I. The Partnership, inspired by the Residency, continued the work in yard during summer months. The organised open evenings according to the needs and expectations of the residents. Some of the events were co-organised by the residents.
- II. The Partnership decided that their members need more experience in the kind of work that was initiated by the Residency – outside institution, non-formal meetings, talks in public, open space. That is why they decide to provide this opportunity for more members that were involved in the residency. This is why during the summer activities new representatives had a chance to meet directly residents and collect the field experience
- III. The Partnership planned to develop new ways of engaging new residents into its work and new forms of communicating with residents. There was organised a planning session where the new mailing lists, Facebook strategy and other dissemination tools were discussed.
- IV. The permanent cooperation between the Institute of Polish Culture and the partnership was established in order to develop new projects based on the residency experience, both taking a form of residency itself or different kinds of vocational training or community work.

### **Review of VET elements of Residency**

VET that emerged took a form of a kind of developing skills and collecting experience in situ, in the frame of real project. The main receiver of that was the young trainee, but the similar opportunity was offered for all other members of the Partnership as well as the community practitioners. This VET has two aspects: was a kind of risky and not secure as normal workshops in a classroom, because located within a real project, but at the same time it was a kind of secure environment because of the cooperation of people with different backgrounds, experiences and professions. The creative team and the whole Partnership was like a kind of safe incubator helping people support each other, widen the horizons of their professions and prepare

them to work in this kind of community project which are always based in interdisciplinary.

⇒ The significant feature of the VET was not only that it was organised in the real social environment, but also that the trainee become the equal member of the creative team, having a chance to discuss and question common initiatives, create her own ideas, take the responsibility for the project

⇒ This form of VET: „in situ”, „project based” and in close cooperation with local social workers and residents inspired the Institute of Polish Culture and the Partnership to develop other similar forms, which will engage students, young culture animators

⇒ Another VET possibility is connected with sharing the experience of the residency with other professionals, who can implement its ideas and forms. This kind of disseminating the knowledge and experience happened already several times: during the seminar about residencies, during the gatherings of local Partnership in Warsaw etc.