

Spanish Residency Project Report



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Espai Germanetes Residency (Barcelona, Spain)

The Barcelona residency took place at Espai Germanetes, a plot located on the left side of Eixample District (Barcelona city). Espai Germanetes used to be an empty plot near the Compte Borrell and Consell de Cent streets in Barcelona. The City Council acquired ownership of the plot in 2006 and promised that public buildings and services would be provided there to meet the longstanding inhabitants' claims and demands. Since then, the plot has been abandoned.

The original project of the City Council was to build an elderly care home, social housing for youth, a high school, and a nursery. None of these proposals have been started nor even planned. Only a row of private apartments was built and sold. Currently, Espai Germanetes is part of the "Plan Buits", a plan promoted by the City Council to allow temporary use of 19 empty plots in Barcelona (including Espai Germanetes). Public institutions, grassroots associations and other non-profit community-based stakeholders are allowed to use the space temporarily. In April 2013, Recreant Cruilles won the competition to manage and use Espai Germanetes. Recreant Cruilles, the host organisation for the Barcelona residency project, emerged from the Assembly of Eixample district, and was driven at the same time by the "indignados" social movement associated with the activists who were camping on Catalonia square in May 2013.

Since that time, people engaged in Recreant Cruilles grassroots movement started managing Espai Germanetes and have delivered many activities to help revitalise the space and the social life in the area. This community-based collective aims to develop a new approach to politics which is underpinned by citizen participation, and which pays special attention to public space management. Recreant Cruilles has always worked to empower citizens by influencing public institutions and has ensured communities have a central role in decision-making processes associated with public space.

The Barcelona Residency project provided an opportunity to strengthen the Espai Germanetes project and Recreant Cruilles movement using participatory arts as a method. Different workshops throughout the 8-week residency have been delivered to promote civic engagement and capacity building in community arts like horizontal gardening, painting and recycling. A community steering group formed by member of the host organisation and residency staff from University of Barcelona coordinated the 8-week residency project, starting 8th April and finishing 3rd June 2015.

"We want the residency project to be a real opportunity to reach more people in the neighbourhood, bringing them close to Espai Germanetes project and sharing our political message: neighbours can (and should) play an active role at defining, shaping and recreating the city."

A. Appointment process for artist.

The appointment process for the artist, as well the rest of processes undertaken to organise the implementation of the art residency at Barcelona, has been managed by the University of Barcelona team and “Recreant Cruïlles” association, the host organisation, with the support of the international partners (Staffordshire University team and Warsaw University team).

The University of Barcelona and the host organisation set a community steering group to manage the day-to-day issues more efficiently. The team comprised members of the University team (researchers and students) and activist-representatives from the “Recreant Cruïlles” association, in particular people already engaged with arts within the association. The steering group defined the artist profile and identified the information needed to publish a call for interested polish artists. The information was packed in the Barcelona Residency Artist Information Pack and emailed to the applicants. Part of the information packed consisted of a description of the context where the artist and the residency was to be hosted (*Espai Germanetes* project – Recreant Cruïlles association), the issues that the hosting organization would like to face and address during the residency implementation, and a list of expectations coming up from the steering group and the *Espai Germanetes* assembly. The *Espai Germanetes* assembly is the group of people from Recreant Cruïlles association that manage the day-by-day issues related to manage the *Espai Germanetes* Project.

The desired artist profile, expectations and issues to address during the residency were validated by the general assembly of the “Recreant Cruïlles” association. 42 candidates submitted their residency project proposals after publishing the open call through the project website, Facebook and other communication channels at Poland. All 42 candidates’ profiles were evaluated by two researchers from the University of Barcelona and two members of the “Recreant Cruïlles” association. As a result, 7 candidates were shortlisted.

In order to select the final 3 candidates that would be interviewed, a participatory workshop was design and held by the community steering group. 7 big-sized posters were design to summarize the information of each candidate shortlisted in the previous stage of the process. A set of criteria to evaluate the candidates was established to facilitate the evaluation at the participatory workshop. The day of the participatory workshop (5.02.2015) “Recreant Cruïlles” representatives presented the posters and the criteria to evaluate the candidates to the workshop participants. Each participant was asked to do his or her evaluation bearing in mind the criteria and the information presented that could be retrieved through the posters at any time. 4 candidates were top-ranked after analysing the participant’s evaluation sheets, two of them were tied so a decision of adding both to the final selection process was made.

The 4 top-ranked were invited for a *Skype* interview with a selection panel composed by members of the universities and “Recreant Cruïlles” association. More specifically, two representatives of “Recreant Cruïlles” association, two researchers from the University of Barcelona, a researcher from Warsaw University and the overall coordinator of Residency project from Staffordshire University comprised the selection panel. The 4 top-artists, one at a time, were asked to introduce their project and to answer different questions posed by the members of the selection panel. After the on-line interviews, the selection panel discussed the strength and weakness of

each candidate and the winner was appointed. Anna Zawadzka and her project *L'espai germanetes – initial ideas*, was the appointed artist to deliver the Barcelona Art Residency at *Espai Germanetes*. The selection panel highlighted her work to adapt the project proposed considering the place and the ongoing community process; she did an important research before writing the proposal, indeed she was the only one that undertook this task from all the candidates. As she works as part of a collective called Mech Build she proposed working with Janek Dowgiałto another member of Mech Build during the residency who would accompany her on aspects of the project and form part of the team along with the trainee and the community practitioner. This proposal was put to the panel and was accepted as they believed that this added strength to the project proposal and would increase the impact of the project.

After the artist appointment, the Spanish and Polish project partners were in contact with the chosen artist to discuss the logistic of her stay as well as the financial and organizational details. The artist signed the agreement with the Warsaw University.

B. What happened? Description of the residency and learning outcomes.

“Recreant Cruïlles” association proposed two main goals for the residency:

1. Outreach *Espai Germanetes* project to increase its awareness among community residents promoting civic engagement.
2. Highlight and spread their political demands to the local authorities, in particular the claim to increase the space managed by the community groups from 500 squares meters to 5000 meters, extending the space for the *Espai Germanetes* project*.

* Nowadays, the lot that is occupied by *Espai Germanetes* project has 500 square meters but there is an empty lot next to it. This empty lot has been claimed by “Recreant Cruïlles” and other community associations in order to develop more open activities for the neighbourhood.

Bearing in mind the goals, the selected artists introduced their residency proposal to the assembly where it was discussed again. The proposal envisaged an important number of actions to be developed at the empty lot, actions to spread the political demands; this is why the chosen name for the residency was “5000 seeds to dream”. At the same time, the trainee and the community practitioner started work with the Residency project.

Unfortunately, at the beginning of the residency the Barcelona local authorities decided to begin works inside the empty lot, a decision that was made without any consultation with the association. Given this scenario, the project had to be modified. Although an initial action was executed inside the plot where people painted crocodiles over the stones, no more actions inside the empty lot were allowed from the local authorities.

We would like to highlight some key issues at the beginning of the residency:

1. The artists’ immersion in the particular community and environment where the residency would be delivered. The steering group and the community practitioner played a key role in this process. They supported and accompanied the artists within the context, linking them quickly with “community gatekeepers” and other key people. As an example, the artists stayed in a neighbour’s house, at the area, the housing options were planned by the steering group in advance. Likewise, the community practitioner and members of the University of Barcelona accompanied the artist to assemblies, meetings and other community actions. Getting to know the community is a core issue to achieve civic engagement goals.
2. Having a positive attitude towards project adjustments. Very often, for internal or external reasons the initial proposal needs some adjustments, this was our case. Artists’ flexibility and patience of all community stakeholders is needed to deal with these changes. In the Barcelona residency case, both artists and community stakeholders up a willingness and an openness to change things when necessary and to spending the initial weeks redefining the project. As a result, the initial idea of landscaping and developing a garden at the empty lot which had

now become impossible thanks to the work of the City Council was transformed into a “mobile” garden to transform other empty lots based at *Espai Germanetes*.

After revising the project and agreeing with the adjustments, the festival of Saint George (*Sant Jordi*) was seized on as an opportunity to attract new people to *Espai Germanetes* Residency. The activity “Combat the dragon” was organized to achieve the first goal.

Actually, the “dragon” was the bulldozer working in the empty lot from the local authorities, and the participants combated it using seed bombs made with earth, water and seeds in a participatory workshop held by the residency. The workshop was organized in collaboration with families and children from the surrounding schools and it finished with more than 20 families bombing the empty lot and the dragon in order to “spread life and green” there. Two outputs were achieved:

1. Many families attended the workshop (more than 20) and few of them had previously collaborated in its organisation (only 3 families were already engaged in the *Espai Germanetes Project*).
2. These families asked and talked about the political demands (i.e. *why are we seed-bombing the lot* and “*what will it achieve?*”).

After this action, the artists started building the mobile garden. The final garden comprised 7 mobile modules and at the moment of writing this report it is located in another lot where a group of neighbours are demanding more public space to be run by and for the community.

In order to undertake the first goal (outreach and civic engagement) the steering group, the artists, the community practitioner and the trainee, from now on the large community steering group, identified three target groups to outreach and engage during the residency: small traders, elderly people and children. These groups were excluded from the ongoing participatory and engagement processes linked with *Espai Germanetes* project. Different engagement strategies were design to reach the three different groups:

1. The engagement strategy to reach the small traders consisted in an information campaign and a distribution of plants among more than 30 small traders at the area (32 small traders were reached). A leaflet and a plant were distributed by the artists, the community practitioner, the trainee and some representatives of Recreant Cruïlles association. This action provided a great opportunity to outreach from the *Espai Germanetes Project* and to invite the small traders to join other activities like mobile garden building workshops. The small traders were asked to expose the given plants, to take care of them during 2 weeks. After these weeks they were invited to plant them in the mobile garden. Another action targeting small traders was to take a picture of each one holding the plant; the artists gave the printed picture back to the small traders in order to generate some sense of belonging to the project. As a learning outcome, although the response from the small traders was excellent, the leaflets and plants distribution was taken over mainly by the trainee, the artists and the community practitioner, we think we missed an opportunity to build mutual recognition between representatives from Recreant Cruïlles and the small traders; the trainee, the community practitioner and the artists went to get to know and talk with them but

as they are not members of the host association this relationships can “disappear” when the residency finishes and they leave the context.

2. The engagement strategy to reach elderly people consisted in mapping the elderly homes allocated in the nearest area of *Espai Germanetes* and visiting them to explain the residency project. 2 elderly homes welcomed the proposal and showed interest in doing some actions with their residents. 2 workshops were design and held at the elderly homes. The workshops were focused in making flowerpots with the participants. 25 people attended the workshops and a final event was organised to present the flowerpots at *Espai Germanetes*, the residents families were invited to join this outdoor activity. It is important to bear in mind that mobility of this group is a challenge and bringing them to the residency place was quite a tough demand.
3. The engagement strategy to reach children was going through public schools and scout's organizations in the area. After mapping and emailing the public schools in the area we received the answer from two of them that welcomed the Residency project. Also, a scout organisation welcomed the initiative and joined the residency project. The main action designed was a participatory workshop where children with their families or scout monitors planted seeds in flowerpots and put them in the different modules of the mobile garden. More than 60 children attended the sequence of 4 workshops that were held. Another two actions were developed in the empty lot: The “Guerrilla” garden and a symbolic occupation of the lot with the mobile garden. The first action consisted in a community walk with the mobile garden around the neighbourhood, during the walk the participants planted plants in the tree planters with messages about the residency and the *Espai Germanetes* project. The second action consisted in entering into the empty lot to make pictures of the mobile garden at the place, a vindication to the local authorities.
4. Finally, a big event call *ARTivism* was organized to share the main outputs of the residency project with the people interested and to discuss about the role that arts can play in social movements.

We would like to conclude by highlighting three key issues:

1. The previous experience of the artist in social movements and grassroots organisations was very valuable in integrating her into the actions quickly and smoothly. She understood the rhythms and pace these actions require to be achieved. If we had appointed another artist without this background it could have hindered the residency implementation process. An understating of the inherent dynamics in civic engagement is needed.
2. During the course of the residency sometimes too many actions were taking place at the same time. This situation was a handicap to engage the representatives and other participants of the host organisation because their capacity to act and get involved was overwhelmed by the process. As a result, many actions were achieved by the “professionals” engaged instead of the volunteers. It is important to bear in mind that during civic engagement process a critical reflection about which roles and who are playing them is needed.
3. Tied up with the above reflection, during the course of the residency some *Recreant Cruïlles* management meetings, like the assembly, were almost brought to a collapse with the issues emerging from the implementation of the residency.

This hindered their agenda and limited the potential to some extent. We would like to point out that a balance between actions to be done and real assets to undertake them should be borne in mind during the whole residency process. The tension between process and results (products) is a tension that is inherently part of working with community and participatory arts. For the sake of sustainability, we strongly believe it is important to balance the tension of process and results.

C. Evaluation of the Community Practitioner role.

Silvia Mestras was the community practitioner appointed for the residency project. Silvia is a Social and Community Psychologist with postgraduate studies in psychosocial and community intervention. Before being appointed she already knew about *Espai Germanetes* project.

The role of the community practitioner during the course of the residency was:

- To accompany the artists throughout the process and to facilitate their familiarisation with the host organization, the community and the culture.
- To work together with the artists in mapping the terrain to find and engage new people and groups in the residency.

Silvia was appointed after a selection process undertaken by the steering group. The followed process was:

1. Setting the criteria for the community practitioner profile. Two criteria were highlighted: (1) the community practitioner should have previous knowledge about the host organization, *Espai Germanetes* project and the people already engaged in this community action; (2) the community practitioner should know about civic engagement and community work methodologies.
2. An open call was done and 8 people submitted as a result. A selection panel composed by two representatives of the host organisation and two researchers of the University of Barcelona shortlisted the candidates and after a deliberation Silvia Mestras was appointed for the community practitioner role.

One of the core roles played by the community practitioner was to liaise the artists and the community members, in particular the *Espai Germanetes* participants. She smoothly helped the artists to understand some cultural and language issues during the course of the residency. We would like to highlight that although the community practitioner played the role of “Spanish translator” sometimes, the lead artist (Anka) already spoke Spanish and this circumstance helped facilitate the residency implementation.

As the residency progressed another core role was played by the community practitioner. She worked side by side with the artists to organise the different actions, like another participant.

We would like to highlight that the “liaison role” played by the community practitioner had a significant effect in delivering the residency but, that at the same time, civically

engaged art residencies enable and promote social bonds between the artists and the participants (community inhabitants, representatives...). In some circumstances these ties may develop stronger throughout the residency course, in particular when the artists are skilled in social competences. As a result, the role of the community practitioner as a “liaison” person can evolve into other areas. We could assert that the shorter the residency is, the more important it is to have a community practitioner playing a liaison role.

D. Evaluation of the residency.

The evaluation of the residency has been undertaken by different stakeholders. A multi-level evaluation in different moments and spaces of the process has been developed. The participants in the evaluation of the residency were:

- Artists.
- Trainee.
- Community practitioner.
- Representatives of the host organisation (*Recreant Cruïlles*).
- Members of the University of Barcelona team of researchers.

The methods used to generate information were semi-structured interviews, focus – groups and field diaries. The method used to analyse the information gathered was a thematic analysis.

The evaluation of effectiveness, impact and civic engagement results are presented below:

Effectiveness

- A first key factor in the effectiveness of the residency was the previous work done by the researcher's team of the University of Barcelona with the host organization before the residency started. The steering group composed by members of the university and the host organization was set on November 2014. Since that moment, five months before the residency began, work started to be done. This work allowed a better adjustment of the residency within the community, a negotiation of objectives, a needs assessment and a discussion about the artist that would fit better in the proposal of residency.
- A second key factor in the effectiveness of the residency was to share the decisions with the host organization, avoiding the host organisation to become a passive recipient of the residency. From the beginning the host organisation endorsed the project.
- A third key factor in the effectiveness of the residency was to develop a horizontal working structure. The university research team tried to promote horizontal relations from the beginning with the host organisation, the artists, the community practitioner and even the trainee. A horizontal working structure meant that everybody was important in pursuit of the residency success. It meant that although each partner played a different role, all them were important. An evidence of the effectiveness of such a working structure was the intense involvement of the host organisation representatives during the course of the process.
- A fourth factor in the effectiveness of the residency was the characteristics of the host organization, *Recreant Cruïlles*, and the existing dynamics already ongoing in the community project in which the residency took part: *Espai Germanetes*. *Recreant Cruïlles* is a citizen assembly-based social movement that emerged from the *Indignados* movement in 2012. *Recreant Cruïlles* currently had the

participation of some community members, among them social educators, architectures, and other professionals. These people have been key assets for the process. Support of the community members was very important not also for the residency implementation but also for its future sustainability.

- Last but not least, the selected profile of the lead artist was a successful choice.

Impact

- In terms of impact we are satisfied with the number and diversity of participants engaged during the course of the residency. As it was mentioned above, an important goal of the residency was to outreach from the *Espai Germanetes* project to increase its awareness among community residents and to promote civic engagement. Three groups were targeted: community small traders, elderly people and children. All the groups targeted were reached through the actions and workshops delivered. At the moment, we can not assert how many of these people are still engaged in the project, more time is needed to assess this issue, but many of them already know about the project and take part in actions like the monthly street market and other big events (neighbourhood parties).
- Another impact was the development of new connections between *Espai Germanetes* and other community arts projects ongoing in the city of Barcelona. More than 50 people attended the final event, *ARTivism*, diverse people from social movements, practitioners of community arts, neighbours and others. Since then we are aware that networking it is still going on.
- Finally, we would like to mention that another impact of the residency was a redefinition of the role that a community artist can play in a social movement. It was positively evaluated in the sense that the role the artist played strengthened the movement itself and the project by working with people to develop and redesign the project rather than just delivering a set of pre-designed workshops. Another impact was that of redefining the role of the researchers. The typical university researcher stereotype is one where they hijack the information they obtain from the participants and do not care about the process itself, i.e. that they only care about publishing and other academic issues. Because of the horizontal working structure and the steering group, this stereotype was challenged and broken.

Civic Engagement

A focus group was held with some participants and the steering groups to discuss about the “forces” that facilitate civic engagement during the course of the residency to analyse the driving forces that facilitate civic engagement and the forces that restrain civic engagement. The results are summarised below:

Civic engagement driving forces:

- Horizontal, relations-based teamwork to be promoted among the participants and the professionals (artists, researchers, trainee and host organization representatives).
- Knowing the language facilitates a foreign artist in having a better understanding of cultural and social issues.

- Civic engagement oriented art residencies goals should rely on the needs perceived by the local people. A genuine dialogue between the professionals (i.e. artists) and the community members should be developed throughout the course of the residency.
- A huge dose of passion and motivation for the project.
- Trust building among the participants through informal relations.
- With regards to the organisation of the process, establishing a community steering group with representatives of the host organization is a key factor in achieving a civic engagement process. The steering group should ideally start its work several months before the residency starts.
- Dissemination is a core activity to promote civic engagement, using the communication channels that already exist in the community is crucial, reaching the gatekeepers.
- Celebrate the small and large successes and victories with the participants.

Civic engagement restraining forces

- The duration of the residency was perhaps too short. In future it should be ideally between 16 and 20 weeks. The artists needed more time to familiarise themselves with the context and to develop the different civic engagement actions without overwhelming the participants and the host organisation.
- A common pitfall to bear in mind is when the pressure of the outcomes pushes the process along and the actions are not well embedded in the host organisation's working patterns.
- Artists' stereotypes among community members. Some community members may see the artist as a unreachable person. Some artists have earned a reputation of been disconnected from the community life and this stereotype could be a restraining force to building trust between artists and community members.
- Not managing the different expectations coming up from each stakeholder.
- When ownership of the project is unequal among the steering group participants.

Sustainability

The residency project has been a stimulus for the host organisation to integrate community arts into their day-by-day work. Before the residency, there had been few actions where arts played an important role at *Espai Germanetes* but they were one offs. At the moment, the representatives of the host organisation engaged during the course of the residency are aware about the potential that civic engagement-oriented arts can play to strengthen their struggle. As a result, they have decided to set a task force that will enhance community arts within the association and the social movement.

A first task force's outcome has been to move the mobile garden into other empty lots in the city of Barcelona where a similar struggle is going on. Nonetheless, a module of the mobile garden stays at *Espai Germanetes* where some participants take care of it.

Moreover, the networking between the university of Barcelona and *Recreant Cruilles* association has been increased and new opportunities to continue researching and doing action has arisen.

Finally, the workshops with children and families to plant seeds still continue. Once per month, in the monthly market, the community arts task force replicate the workshop done by the artist in order to outreach from the host organisation in the project.

Vocational training issues that arose as part of the residency

The trainee was the prime focus for vocational training during the project however we can assert that all the partners and participants have been trained in civic engagement-oriented arts. The horizontal working structure and the immersion in all activities required by the teamwork approach allowed a common understanding of community arts among all the participants.

After the experience, we would like to highlight three key questions to answer within a community artist's VET programme:

1. How to manage uncertainty? Very often initial planning and ideas change, specific skills to deal with this situation are required among the community artist looking forward delivering civic engagement residencies.
2. Which are your social skills? Communication, teamwork, relationship conflict management and participatory skills are required to deliver a civic engagement-oriented art residency.
3. Which is the artistic discipline you like the most? The artists are expected to have appropriated skills and knowledge in one artistic discipline, at least.