



**Community Builders
Under Construction**

METHODOLOGICAL BOOKLET



INTRODUCTION

Community (Builders) Under Construction (CUC, 2023-2025) is a European cooperation project co-funded by the Creative Europe programme.

The project explores innovative approaches to community building through socially engaged art, bringing together marginalized communities from Hungary and France.

OUR GOAL

Our goal is to build meaningful connections and collective agency among marginalized communities through co-created artistic processes; to support participants in recognizing the value and power of belonging; to capacitate future community builders; and to use art as a tool to enhance participants' wellbeing.

This booklet documents our journey of practice, reflection, and continuous learning. It captures the experiences, challenges, and insights gained over two years of intensive work with Roma youth in rural Hungary and the hip-hop community of Sarcelles, France.

In more practical terms, it presents the CUC methodology, which integrates socially engaged art, relational art practices and community ownership. It is intended as a hands-on resource for:

- artists and cultural workers exploring ethical frameworks for community engagement,

- social workers and educators interested in arts-based approaches,
- project coordinators developing cross-cultural initiatives,
- community organizers seeking participatory methodologies,
- and anyone interested in the intersection of art, community building, and social transformation.

Each section offers a mix of concrete methods, short video summaries, and honest reflections on what worked and what didn't. The booklet can be read from beginning to end or consulted selectively based on immediate needs.

We share this project not as a blueprint to be replicated but as an adaptable framework – one that can be questioned, and further expanded in different contexts.

WE ARE

The project is coordinated by Pro Progressione (Hungary), in partnership with Effetto Larsen (Italy) and DK-BEL (France), and associated partners InDaHouse Hungary and ArtLab - Allons Enfants.

Pro Progressione is a Budapest-based artistic hub that connects people, professions and ambitions by designing international collaborations within the cultural and creative sectors. This creates an environment where innovative ideas can emerge: artists, cultural activists, scientists and experts from various fields meet and give cutting-edge answers to the most pressing questions of our time. Through this work, Pro Progressione encourages communities across the cultural and creative fields to act as stewards of social change.

Effetto Larsen is a Milan-based organization that uses relational art as a tool for developing a sense of community. They design and carry out projects that foster connections among groups of people, intervening wherever there is an opportunity to create or enhance community bonds – whether at artistic festivals or in corporate settings. They combine their creative skills with communication and problem-solving strategies, along with coaching and facilitation techniques.

Compagnie DK-BEL, established in Villiers-le-Bel in 2004, is dedicated to promoting art within minority communities. Known for performances created by and featuring both disabled and non-disabled artists, the company's primary focus is on sensitization and inclusion, strengthening social bonds through artistic creation.

THE CUC TEAM

FRANCE

Artistic Team

Sophie Bulbulyan (lead artist)
 Abibou Playmo Kebe (artist)
 Thomas Rebischung (visual storyteller)
 Cheickna Wagué (visual storyteller)

Social worker

Adrien Behra

Ambassadors

Kenzo Anthonipilai
 Shana Bunet-Delvin
 Shaïne Coulibaly
 Timothée Debethune
 Fatoumata Diakite
 Benjamin Manzana
 Alicia Semedo Moreno
 Sabrina Rotsen

Mentoring

Matteo Lanfranchi
 Paolo Pezzana

Project Management

Isadora Bigazzi
 Karla Brooker
 Livia Marschall
 Anna Némethné Molnár

HUNGARY

Artistic Team

Piroska Móga (lead artist)
 Henrik Nagy (artist)
 Mátyás Kovács (visual storyteller)
 Dániel Széplaki (visual storyteller)

Social workers

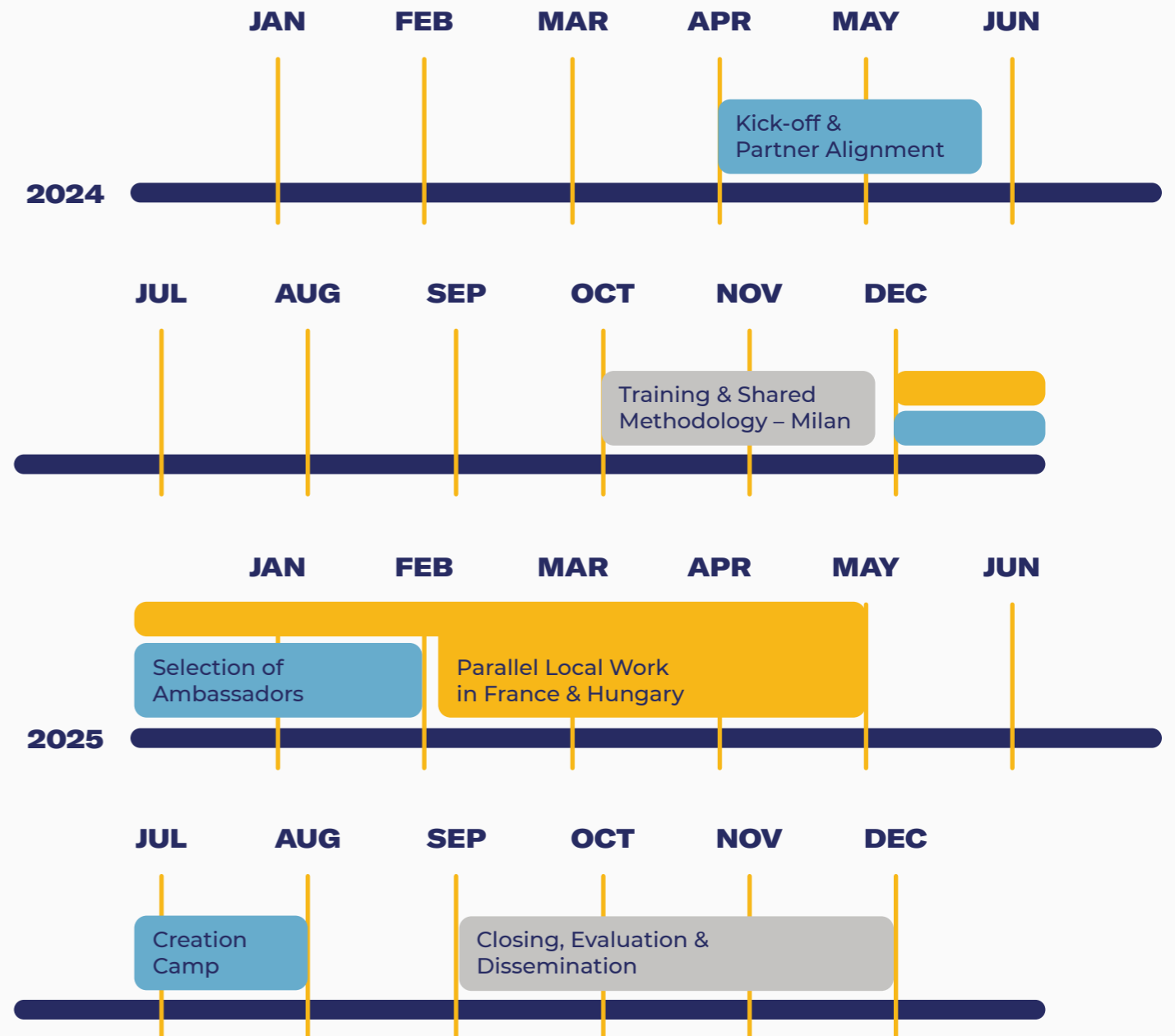
Fruzsina Benkő
 Apolka Vinis

Ambassadors

Szabolcs Gulyás
 János Kuru
 Mirella Ruszó



PROJECT TIMELINE



THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

COMMUNITY-BASED ART IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Our contemporary social landscape is marked by increasing digital connectivity, yet many people experience a growing sense of isolation. This tension urges us to rethink the very notion of “community.” In this context, community-based art is not just a creative activity. It becomes an essential mechanism for addressing social fragmentation, strengthening collective identity, and constructing alternative, inclusive narratives that give space to people who are often excluded. The CUC project anchors its work in this need. It understands community not as a static structure defined by geography or identity, but as a dynamic space shaped by shared experiences and active relationships.

THE MILAN TRAINING: RELATIONAL ART METHODOLOGY

Effetto Larsen’s methodology views art as occurring in the space between people, where relationships and shared experiences become the primary creative material, shifting the artist’s role to facilitator and co-learner. To incorporate this relational approach within the CUC project, the Hungarian and French core teams came together for a methodology training in October 2024, led by Effetto Larsen in Milan, to establish a shared foundation before local work began.

The goal was to build a common mindset for socially engaged art, focusing on the project’s mission, aligning expectations, and developing a shared language. Theoretical and practical tools were introduced to foster team cohesion and trust. Practices explored included

using the body, working with emotional complexity, designing interactive physical spaces, and embracing play as a tool for shared learning.

Key principles that emerged:

- humility when entering communities,
- active listening that includes silence and non-verbal cues,
- co-creation from the outset,
- gatekeeping to protect against extractive practices,
- and art as a tool for wellbeing and agency.

Theoretical references ranged from relational art to participatory action research, inspired by artists like Milo Rau, with attention to hip-hop and music as identity-building cultural systems.

The training provided an adaptable ethical-relational approach – a solid foundation from which the core teams could develop their co-creation work.

THE AMBASSADOR METHOD

A key element of CUC is the Ambassador Method, in which trusted community members act as bridges between a project and local participants: ambassadors represent their communities, contribute to decision-making, facilitate access, and empower others. Their role is both relational and transformative, ensuring that the project leaves a lasting legacy within the community while inspiring others through a fun and rewarding journey of collaboration.

Ambassadors are often identified based on community proximity, motivation, and leadership potential with the help of people who hold local knowledge and an understanding of the individual’s history and capacities. Ambassadors are not expected to be artists or professionals, but active co-creators within the project. In this project, we aimed both to capacitate ambassadors – providing them with tools, knowledge, and opportunities to grow as facilitators and community builders – and to leverage their role as bridges between the artists and local participants.

For a detailed description, please see our [Ambassador Criteria](#).



ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

WHY AN ETHICAL FRAMEWORK?

Working with communities, particularly marginalized groups, is a profound responsibility that extends beyond artistic aims. An ethical framework is essential to ensure the physical, emotional, and psychological safety of everyone involved – artists, social workers, and participants alike. It clarifies our core responsibilities, establishes necessary professional and personal boundaries, and sets clear rules of engagement that consistently prioritize dignity, consent, and wellbeing over any artistic outcome.

The framework also establishes a space for respectful and transparent cross-sectoral collaboration, where artistic vision and social work expertise are valued equally and communicate openly.

[READ MORE](#)

SUPERVISION AND MENTORING

Supervision and mentoring are important components of any community process, especially when working closely with marginalized communities. Such work generates emotional intensity, uncertainty, and personal exposure for everyone involved.

It is crucial to clarify expectations for both processes from the outset, so that everyone understands their purpose, timing, and limits. Supervision is not designed to deliver immediate solutions to every difficulty, nor is mentoring a form of friendship or therapy. It is crucial, however, that both supervision and mentoring are embedded in the project structure to anticipate challenges, provide guidance, and help uphold the project's artistic vision and integrity, while nurturing the contributions and safety of everyone involved.

The project therefore highlights the need for strong and proactive supervision systems – ensuring that wellbeing remains the foundation of every community-building step.



METHODOLOGY IN PRACTICE

LOCAL WORK

Our local engagement in both Hungary and France spanned six months, structured around periodic, intensive work blocks. The process moved from community engagement and trust-building, through exploratory identity work and collective narrative creation, towards collaborative artistic production.



Engagement strategies remained adaptive throughout, responding to each group's rhythm, interests, and emerging needs, while identity exploration and narrative creation consistently guided the artistic direction.



HUNGARY

PARTICIPATORY FILMMAKING, DRAMA, AND SOCIO THERAPY

CONTEXT AND TARGET GROUP

CUC had a direct predecessor: a two-year Creative Europe project titled What'SAP – Exchange of Social Art Practices (2020-2022). What'SAP aimed to promote the recognition of socially engaged art as a distinct profession across Europe. During those two years, Pro Progressione collaborated with four organizations – including DK-BEL.

Within What'SAP, Pro Progressione worked together with InDaHouse Hungary to reach Roma teenagers from rural areas more effectively. The project team worked with high school students aged 15-19, involved in InDaHouse's mentoring programs.

From this group, the team selected five boys to participate in the 2022

What'SAP international camp – all from the local village or nearby segregated settlement – based on their enthusiasm and engagement during the drama sessions. They demonstrated remarkable concentration, dedication, and joy during the workshops and on stage, forming deep connections with each other and with international participants.

These young people inspired the creation of CUC. The project team felt a strong responsibility to build on what had begun in What'SAP – to offer continuity, growth opportunities, and a sense of belonging that would extend beyond a single project cycle. CUC, and the incorporation of the Ambassador Method in particular, was developed with their active participation and capacity-building in mind.

Building on the foundation established in What'SAP, Pro Progressione once again partnered with InDaHouse Hungary for the CUC project.

InDaHouse Hungary is a civil organization that supports the long-term development of disadvantaged children and young people living in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, one of Hungary's poorest regions. Its programs, run by staff and volunteers, focus on early childhood development, providing continuous support from birth through the "Nagy Tanoda" after-school program and into young adulthood.

The local context presents significant socio-cultural challenges, including poverty and unemployment, which forces many families to rely on public work or social benefits, thereby affecting children's nutrition, clothing, and access to learning resources. Low educational attainment among parents further limits support for learning at home. Segregation and isolation, particularly in areas with high Roma populations, such as Fügöd, restrict access to cultural, recreational, and developmental opportunities. These factors perpetuate generational poverty, resulting in feelings of hopelessness and low motivation. Additionally, mistrust towards institutions due to negative past experiences make

families reluctant to engage with schools or social services, hindering cooperation and early intervention. For children, these combined disadvantages may lead to delayed cognitive and speech development, emotional and behavioral difficulties, low self-esteem, school-

related anxiety, early school dropout, restricted aspirations, and limited exposure to positive role models.

Understanding these challenges helps the project respond effectively to the real needs of the target group. It highlights the importance of trust-based, long-term, holistic support.



PARTICIPANTS AND GROUP DYNAMICS

During the local work, we worked with 17 children aged 13 and above from the Nagy Tanoda program. This group later expanded to 40 participants during the summer camp, which also included 10-11-year-old children from Fügöd.

Our three Ambassadors were graduates of the Nagy Tanoda program, and were the oldest InDaHouse mentees, aged 18 to 21.

In addition, eight volunteers from the InDaHouse volunteer network and five staff members supported the process. Their involvement meant that the work engaged not only the children but also the wider community of InDaHouse.

At the beginning of the local work, boys and girls felt more comfortable in separate social settings, which is a typical dynamic for their age. However, because most children attend the same local school and interact daily, both InDaHouse and the CUC program aimed to create a different kind of community from what existed in their school.

In the case of children's groups, it is particularly important that – regardless of the kind of artistic work we do – we keep in mind that children are in an intensive period of socialization. Depending on their age, they are actively seeking role models and examples to follow. For this reason, the Ambassador Method played a crucial role in our work: the three young adults involved also functioned as role



models for their peers who were five to six years younger.

For the children, the sessions offered a break from their stimulus-poor environment and provided moments of excitement, creativity, and relief from the pressures and difficulties they often face at home.

WHERE SOCIO THERAPY MEETS COMMUNITY ART: METHODOLOGICAL GROUNDWORK

In planning the creative process, our aim was to select artistic methods that could effectively support both the participants' individual development and the community-building goals of the project.

While sociotherapy is explicitly therapeutic – aimed at supporting an individual's psychological, educational, or social healing – it is typically carried out within structured, often institutional settings. Its focus is the wellbeing and development



of the individual, using group processes as a supportive environment.

Community art practices, on the other hand, seek to promote social change, strengthen community bonds, and foster collective empowerment. Their emphasis is on participation and shared experience rather than individual development. They do not necessarily unfold within therapeutic settings or with therapeutic intent; nevertheless, their impact can often be therapeutic in nature.

Where, and in what ways, can these two approaches intersect? In our view, the point of connection lies in the needs of the target group.

The Hungarian core team brought together a diverse set of competencies, including expertise in drama pedagogy, physical theatre, art therapy, and film. To ensure a focused and coherent working process, we chose participatory

filmmaking as the leading artistic discipline – meaning that the group's primary creative output would be film-based.

Among the four art forms, film appeared to be the most complex, as it can integrate elements of all the others. Moreover, preparing for filmmaking naturally involves – and benefits from – the use of drama, art therapy, and physical theatre techniques to support the participants' creative and emotional growth.

At the same time, it was crucial not to burden the children with activities that might exceed their abilities or trigger age-related insecurities or feelings of embarrassment. For this reason, we avoided dance or movement-based exercises, as we observed that the 12-14-year-olds tended to show strong resistance to situations that drew attention to their bodies. However, we encouraged them to find forms of movement that felt comfortable and joyful for them as a way to release tension and celebrate being together.

APPLIED TECHNIQUES AND ACTIVITIES

Creating safe spaces for expression

While participatory filmmaking offers multiple opportunities for co-creation, self-expression, collaboration, and both individual and collective empowerment, it is important to recognize that it requires some participants to eventually appear in front of the camera. They need to feel ownership and pride in their on-screen presence, as the permanence of film turns these moments into lasting imprints.

The process therefore involves three key challenges: building cooperation so that the children can form a cohesive film team; encouraging self-expression so they can truly feel ownership of their work; and creating an emotionally safe space that allows them to step in front of the camera – and later, to watch themselves with confidence.

The first steps focused on introducing the children to the basics of filmmaking and nurturing their interest in the cinematic way of seeing. We encouraged them to observe both their inner and outer worlds and to use the camera as a means of expression. During the first three exercises, they appeared in front of the camera only in abstract or indirect ways, if at all.

We share below the different building blocks designed to achieve the aspired community cohesion and space for co-creation.

Session structure and flow

The structure of the three-hour sessions was relatively fixed to increase the children's sense of safety through a certain level of predictability. The only flexible element was the breaks, which we extended or repeated according to the children's needs. To ensure this structure was effective, we went over the day's plan before each session with the Ambassadors, clarifying our objectives, their contribution to the group process, and how they might support the children's development.

Sessions began with a brief framework introduction: an overview of the schedule; a formal naming of facilitators and Ambassadors (noting absences or guests); and a short plan summary.

Next came the icebreakers: short warm-up games to energize the group and gauge the participants' mood. These also laid the groundwork for the next steps (e.g., simple games involving movement or touch).

As group trust developed, we introduced opening check-in circles, asking about the children's mood in an associative, playful way (e.g., "What's the weather like inside you today?").

The heart of each session was the creative activity—or, when already completed, post-production, presentation, and celebration.

Each workshop ended with a closing circle for reflection, sharing, and integration of the day's experience.



1 LIGHT PAINTING – “INNER VALUES”



Using Dixit cards or other images, participants are asked to choose a card that holds a positive and calming meaning for them. What value does this card evoke? (e.g., love, honesty, family, trust, wisdom, etc.)

If there were a guardian spirit representing this value, what would it look like? What would your own guardian spirit be like?

After the discussion, each participant steps up to the camera and, using light painting – by adjusting the camera's shutter speed and using a few colored flashlights—creates an image representing their chosen value. The resulting image is immediately displayed with a projector.

A completely darkened space is required for this activity.

[WATCH VIDEO](#)

2 POLAROID PHOTO – “OBSERVING THE OUTSIDE”



The participants take a Polaroid photo titled “There’s something strange and inexplicable.” They are asked to photograph anything in the space that feels strange or mysterious, but no people may appear in the picture. After the photo develops, it is placed on a blank sheet of drawing paper. Participants then complete the image so that the finished drawing conveys something entirely different. The completed works are then discussed: first, the group shares their interpretations and imaginings about the picture, and then the creator explains their original idea. Using the group’s reflections, the creator finally gives the image a new title.

[WATCH VIDEO](#)

We ask participants about their personal hiding places:

*Where do you find peace and comfort?
Where do you go when you need calm and safety?*

Based on their answers, we collect words and write them on a large sheet of paper. Using these words, participants compose haiku poems in the traditional haiku structure – three lines with 5-7-5 syllables. Finally, we create a short film inspired by the poems, using figures, colored paper, clay, and other materials.

[WATCH VIDEO](#)

HAIKU 3 MOVIE WITH OBJECTS – “SAFE SPACE”



Participants receive news titles that do not come from a journalistic context – for example, titles inspired by Roma folktales. Based on these titles, the participants write fake news reports.

Each report includes the following main characters: the reporter, the victim or perpetrator, the witness, the opponent, and the expert. The reporter interviews each character, while a team member not on camera records the interviews.

Costumes are provided for participants to choose from.

[WATCH VIDEO](#)

FICTIONAL 4 NEWS – “FIRST TIME BEFORE THE CAMERA”



5 SHORT MOVIE – “FORMING A FILM CREW”

To conclude the local work, we held a four-day camp to allow participants to engage in more in-depth creative filmmaking. The goal was to give the young participants the opportunity to work both in front of and behind the camera.

Filmmaking is a complex form of

teamwork, offering excellent practice in collaboration, division of labor, focused attention, and the joy of achieving a shared creative goal.

By this stage, participants had already gotten to know and trust us, had experienced various successes with the camera, and were comfortable with being recorded on video. The group was thus ready for a more complex filmmaking process.



Acting without acting

We used a methodology in which participants embodied characters without being given pre-assigned roles. Instead of introducing characters and a storyline, we placed them in situations through simple rule-based games.

On the sports field, for example, we played a game of statue tag. At one point, the participants were asked to freeze in place while the tagger – a girl – moved around them. We filmed the tagger as she walked among the frozen peers, briefly observing them before leaving the space.

By the next day, we had edited this scene and showed it to the group: *What happened? Who might this girl be? Who are the others? How could the story continue?*

This sparked the narrative foundation of the film.

Co-creating a script

We continued the process of building the narrative in small groups. Each group could choose from four distinctive props – a prohibition sign, a warning tape, an abandoned coat, or a camera – all of which had to be included in their story.

Each group presented their versions, after which we collected and drew a map of potential nearby filming locations (e.g., riverside, abandoned house, forest path, football field). By combining elements from each version, we structured the story around these locations in chronological order.



We assigned characters to each location and gave them names, ensuring that every child had a role to play. The full story was scripted, but participants improvised dialogue according to the plot and their characters.

Participatory shooting process

Each stage of the filming process was carried out by the entire team. Even when it might have been more practical to send only the actors to a location, we felt that our community goals were better served by staying together as a group. Of course, this required even greater coordination and discipline, with ambassadors setting a good example and motivating the younger participants. Apart from the camera itself, all equipment was handled by the children – including the sound recording, clapperboard, reflectors, and props. They also helped prepare and clean filming locations. At the children's request, we celebrated the end of the shoot with a group football game.



6 ONE-SHOT MUSIC VIDEO



This participatory film technique, inspired by documentary filmmaker Sára Haragonics, involves creating a one-shot music video for a song chosen by the group, with every member participating as a performer. Filmed in a single take, the process requires the group to remain focused and cooperative throughout the 2-3 minute recording.

The heart of the process lies in the preparation, while the successful recording itself represents the core community experience – a shared achievement of all participants.

[WATCH VIDEO](#)



INTEGRATION OF RELATIONAL ART CONCEPTS

During the local work phase, we made a conscious effort to integrate the relational methodologies introduced during the Milan training – particularly the gatekeeper method and the community-focused skillset (see chapter 10).

Our ambassadors effectively acted as gatekeepers throughout the process. Their contribution was multifaceted:

- **Mobilizing community members:** They actively engaged the children and encouraged their participation.
- **Sparking interest:** Their presence in everyday community life meant everyone knew about the project. They frequently shared experiences from the earlier What'SAP project, generating curiosity, motivation, as well as openness – especially towards the arrival of our French guests and the summer camp.
- **Facilitation:** With our guidance, they helped organize games and interactive activities, supporting trust-building and cooperation within the group.

We also relied heavily on the skills list when planning sessions. Our aim was to enable them to exercise these skills while simultaneously strengthening their sense of belonging and fostering a more cohesive group identity through creative and participatory activities.



Gatekeeping in practice

Between sessions, the Ambassadors acted as essential bridges between the children and the artistic team. They maintained regular contact with the youngsters and often alerted the core team to important changes in their lives. This enabled us to respond with greater sensitivity and to provide more personalized support.

The trust that developed between the children and the Ambassadors became a cornerstone of the process. Their local knowledge was invaluable – from choosing appropriate filming locations to avoiding potential missteps due to cultural or contextual nuances. Overall, the ambassadors significantly increased the program's effectiveness and played a central role in reinforcing trust and establishing the necessary conditions for artistic work.

IDENTITY MOOD BOARD CREATION

To visually synthesize and express their collective narrative, the children co-created a film-based “mood board” by the end of the local work. They produced a wide range of visual materials – light paintings, Polaroid portraits, drawings, haikus, role-play recordings, and short experimental video scenes – that together captured their shared identity, cultural heritage, everyday realities, and hopes for the future.

Step by step, these creative exercises enabled the group to explore who they are both as individuals and as a community. An evolving visual language emerged, expressing their values,

memories, sources of strength, and the small wonders they observe in their environment. This process not only solidified their own narrative but also produced a rich body of filmic material for the subsequent exchange with the French group.

The work culminated in a collaboratively written and produced short fiction film created during the spring camp – a multidimensional portrait of how the children understand themselves and their identity.

[WATCH VIDEO](#)

FRANCE

HIP-HOP DANCE AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

CONTEXT AND TARGET GROUP

DK-BEL has worked for over two decades in Villiers-le-Bel, a town in the northern suburbs of Paris, marked by economic hardship and rich immigrant diversity. For this project, it partnered with ArtLab - Allons Enfants in neighboring Sarcelles to reach local youth from migrant and refugee backgrounds. The local context is shaped by high rates of single-parent families, limited resources, and a persistent sense of marginalisation.

Understanding the hip-hop cultural context was essential to this work. Hip-hop, a cultural movement originating in the US, first took root in France in the early 1980s, flourishing in the youth and cultural centres of these working-class neighbourhoods. By the late 2000s, it

had evolved into formal educational programming.

As artistic facilitators in the northern suburbs, DK-BEL has always appreciated the positive energy but also the deeper significance of hip-hop – using artistic expression (rap, graffiti, dance) to combat violence. It's fundamentally a culture for peace, carrying the message of Afrika Bambaataa and the Zulu Nation values: "Peace, Love, Unity and Having fun," alongside respect and unity of peoples. Each discipline contains an element of self-improvement, encouraging practitioners to push their limits. As KRS-One stated, "Hip-hop is a way of life that empowers youth, challenges authority, and expresses individuality."

INCLUSIVE DANCE METHODOLOGY: DK-BEL'S APPROACH

DK-BEL's work is grounded in the belief that art, and hip-hop in particular, is a powerful tool for empowerment, self-expression, and social connection. Our methodology, developed over 20 years in France and abroad, promotes inclusion through art with the following objectives: promote access to culture for all by changing perceptions (especially around disability); empower residents through artistic practice; create connections through collaborative dance; and combat all forms of discrimination.

Our foundational slogan is "Having eyes to see the Other." The work begins with knowing how to look at the person without judgment, creating a relationship. We build self-confidence through movement by creating a safe environment where participants can take creative risks – free from the fear of judgment that stifles creativity. While confidence is necessary, it's not sufficient; participants must also break free from usual thought patterns and self-censorship to let creativity express

itself. The goal is to influence their feeling of self-efficacy – the belief in their ability to succeed.

The method starts from who the participants are, working from their abilities and guiding them to surpass limitations together. It values individual identities and characteristics, finding common ground among diverse perspectives. Drawing from experience with people with disabilities, the artists work to bring each individuality to light to serve a collective process or creation.

COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS AND NEEDS

Through our long-term presence and partnerships – particularly with ArtLab and the Jean-Jacques Rousseau high school in Sarcelles – DK-BEL has built deep trust and expertise in working locally with children, teenagers, and adults, both with and without disabilities, including young people who often feel alienated from formal education.

The Jean-Jacques high school's hip-hop section has successfully served as a unique point of entry, welcoming students who might struggle academically but who found motivation and confidence through dance, leading to improved attendance and re-engagement with learning. To continue this journey post-graduation, ArtLab was founded,



focusing on transmission, event creation, and intergenerational sharing within Sarcelles' hip-hop community.

Each DK-BEL and ArtLab project has a strong pedagogical impact: they support young people in developing their personality, education, social and professional integration, and citizenship. The youth learn to recognize their individual potential and pursue diverse training possibilities. This pedagogical relationship—grounded in high standards, self-respect, respect for others, tolerance, cultural openness, commitment to the common good, and the value of work—serves as the foundation for success.

For CUC, the core team worked with a group of 22 young people (12 girls, 10 boys), aged 14 to 18, who were students and dancers in this high school. Additionally, we engaged eight ambassadors: six student ambassadors aged 16-18 (members of ArtLab), and two adult ambassadors aged 25-30 (ArtLab

founding members).

These young dancers form a tightly-knit, mutually supportive group, yet they often remain immersed in their dance world and can disengage in traditional, top-down settings. Their primary needs were: to step outside their comfort zone; build self-confidence beyond movement; work on openness and trust with adults (given often complex home lives and a general compromised trust in adults); and engage in ambitious projects to boost self-esteem.

Working with this group required acknowledging a complex reality: while the broader social environment is often chaotic, the hip-hop community offers a welcoming, supportive space. While attentive listening and genuine care are essential, building full trust between the youth and external facilitators requires sustained effort—creating a truly safe environment is a gradual process.

APPLIED TECHNIQUES AND ACTIVITIES

A series of six 3-hour workshops were held at the Jean-Jacques Rousseau high school between December 2024 and May 2025, facilitated by the artists and social worker Adrien Behra. Each session had three objectives: exploring identity, using hip-hop values as a narrative tool, and preparing ambassadors for their

roles in the CUC project. Sessions began with an introduction of aims and planned activities, and ended with a reflective closing circle.



1 IDENTITY & SELF- PORTRAITS



Led by artist Playmo and supported by two older ambassadors acting as gatekeepers and facilitators, the group explored hip-hop values in depth. Working in pairs, participants created short choreographies based on one core value (Peace, Love, Unity, Having Fun).

They danced on large paper panels with painted feet, translating the energy and movement into collective visual art. A technical team (including four ambassadors) managed setup, video recording on phones, and cleanup, emphasizing teamwork and peer leadership.

[WATCH VIDEO](#)

Before addressing collective identity, the team explored individual expression. Each participant answered three questions using automatic (free, uncensored) writing: “What do you think about yourself?”, “What is relevant to you?”, and “Who do you want to be?”

They then created large-format self-portraits, adding words and phrases. These were mailed to InDaHouse Hungary, providing a powerful first introduction to the Hungarian youth.

EMBODYING 2 HIP-HOP VALUES



3 DEEPENING & PRACTICE & CONNECTION

These sessions continued the format with improved technical handling and greater ambassador autonomy. Participants created new choreographies and produced black-and-white panels for a future installation in Sarcelles. They also collaboratively hand-painted a Q&A panel for the Hungarian team about French culture and community life, which was sent to InDaHouse to build connection before the summer camp.

Each session required careful preparation (painting overalls, tarpaulin, paper panels, paint, trays, tape) and a coordinated workflow: setup, rotating between dancing and painting, removing panels to dry, discussion during drying time, and finally a collective cleanup.



5 ROLE & PREPARATION

These dedicated sessions focused on the ambassador role. The first session, led by Playmo and Adrien Behra, centered on hip-hop culture and community belonging, and invited participants to articulate and share their sense of pride. The second session addressed the question, "How do you see your role as community representatives externally?" and covered Hungary's geopolitical context alongside

themes of discrimination, cultural empathy, and open-mindedness. Former What'SAP participants of African and Caribbean descent shared experiences of Hernádszentandrás, offering their insights into cross-cultural exchange.

Throughout these sessions, the social worker and older ambassadors were positioned as crucial gatekeepers for maintaining a safe environment during the project.

INTEGRATION OF RELATIONAL ART CONCEPTS

The Milan training informed the French process through several key principles: building trust, active listening, curiosity, and cultural empathy. The team aimed to create a safe environment where differences were accepted at every step. The first local work activity – creating self-portraits – offered participants a way to better understand themselves while strengthening their confidence, communication skills, and sense of belonging through active participation.

Ambassador engagement strategies required balancing participation, co-creation, and leadership development:

- **Creating space for participation:** Ambassadors needed meaningful opportunities to contribute to decision-making, planning, and

implementation, fostering ownership of the process.

- **Encouraging co-creation:** Engagement was strongest when ambassadors collaborated with peers, mentors, and facilitators to design activities together, ensuring their voices were heard.
- **Empowering leadership:** Providing gradual responsibility, mentorship, and structured guidance helped them grow into confident leaders – a process requiring time and trust.
- **Building trust and safety:** Establishing clear values (mutual respect, tolerance, openness) created the foundation for authentic engagement.
- **Sustaining long-term involvement:** Continuous opportunities for reflection, feedback, and growth ensured ambassadors remained motivated and connected.

IDENTITY MOOD BOARD CREATION

Mirroring the Hungarian process, the French group co-created a visual mood board integrating elements from the painted dance panels, photographic documentation, and keywords from workshop discussions, capturing the vibrant, collective identity of Sarcelles' hip-hop youth.



ARTISTIC NARRATIVE CREATION



THE CREATION CAMP

Co-creation in France

Following the completion of the local work, participants prepared for their first face-to-face encounter: the project culminated in a two-week-long intensive

Creation Camp – first in Paris then in Hernádszentandrás – dedicated to merging the two community narratives (with the help of the mood boards). The French team first introduced the Hungarian team to their hip-hop community and its core disciplines: dance, DJing, sampling, graffiti.

Key co-creation moments in Paris

- **Dance & Painting Workshop:** Ambassadors collaborated in Franco-Hungarian dance duos and trios with paint on their feet, recreating the panel-creation process from the local work phase. French ambassadors guided the Hungarian team in this co-creation.
- **Music Creation with Samples:** Divided into mixed groups, ambassadors created sounds guided by an instructor from the Sample Academy. One composition was chosen as the soundtrack for the camp's music video to be filmed in Hungary.
- **Community Mural in Sarcelles:** The collaborative creation of a mural in the Flanades district – emblematic of Sarcelles and its hip-hop community – was a project highlight. Visual artist Thomas Rebuschung brought together both teams and local residents, including older generations of the Sarcelles hip-hop community who came to witness and share the moment. This “celebration step” led to the emergence of unity as a guiding theme across the entire camp.
- **Relational Workshops:** In a workshop led by Effetto Larsen, the ambassadors realized they shared many of the same challenges, including a deep, pervasive lack of confidence in navigating the adult world. In preparation for the trip to Hernádszentandrás, a subsequent workshop by the Hungarian artists used playful activities to introduce key principles for engaging with a new community.



Co-creation in Hungary

The second part of the Creation Camp took place in Hungary at the headquarters of InDaHouse Hungary. While the spring phase focused on working with older youth attending the Nagy Tanoda, the summer camp – at the organisation's request – also included a younger group of 9-11-year-olds from the nearby segregated settlement of Fügöd. For this bigger group, we developed a multi-day interactive game based on Joanna Parkes' *The Elemental Island*, a Theatre in Education (TIE) drama.

Concept and development

The concept, used with Joanna Parkes' permission, was based on her original idea:

“In this drama, we create a fictional island where four different groups of people live. Through the drama process, participants have the opportunity to develop a cultural identity and traditions for these people, based on who they are and where they live. Each cultural group is associated with a different element – the Fire People who live by the volcano

in the mountains, the Water People who live by the sea, the Earth People who live in homes underground, and the Air People who live high up in the treetops. Through the story, participants are encouraged to recognize what people have in common – the things that unify and connect us – while also celebrating the richness of cultural diversity.”

We adapted this concept to fit the local context and age group. Our goal was to create a playful and emotionally engaging experience through which the children could explore cooperation, empathy, and imagination. We assigned roles such as shamans or wizards to the French ambassadors – characters that did not require verbal communication yet offered rich opportunities for co-creation with the children through nonverbal expressions, including movement, dance, and song.

By immersing themselves in the story and embodying the island’s inhabitants, the children were able to reflect on identity, belonging, and community in a way that felt both safe and inspiring.



Implementation process

The drama unfolded over three days with the children from Fügöd:

- **Day 1:** Building the identity of the four tribes – developing their cultures, traditions, and symbols.
- **Day 2:** Testing the strengths of the tribes through a playful Olympic Games
- **Day 3:** The tribes united to defeat the Monster that threatened their shared island, restoring peace and celebrating their collective victory.

Impact on participants

The main goal of the game was to help the children see their younger peers from Fügöd in a different light. The location itself contributed to this aim, as most of the children from the segregated neighbourhood had never visited Hernádszentandrás, a village just six kilometers from their homes.

There is strong discrimination against children from the segregated area. Many parents forbid their children from going near the neighbourhood, and the village youth themselves often speak negatively about peers from poorer conditions.

However, the drama workshop created a transformative moment: the 9-11-year-olds from Fügöd took the stage to present their tribe’s flag, choreography, and battle cry – while the older village children watched from the audience. The adults and international guests responded with genuine enthusiasm, and this excitement gradually influenced the village youth. They began to notice that the same younger children they usually dismissed were working together with remarkable focus, creating a magical world in which four tribes lived in peace.

Over the next two days, we gradually integrated the two groups through various activities. The village youth joined and helped facilitate skill-based games, and by the third day, they were performing on stage together. This shift was supported by the openness of the French guests, InDaHouse volunteers, and ambassadors, whose attitude set the tone and encouraged the village youth to participate more willingly.

While three days cannot undo long-standing prejudice or social barriers, the impact was clear: the children from Fügöd experienced a rare sense of inclusion and recognition.



VISUAL STORYTELLING

Visual storytelling in CUC was a dynamic practice of co-creation rather than mere documentation. Mirroring the project's multidisciplinary artistic approach, visual storytelling took multiple forms: two community murals, linked by a documentary film that weaves together both communities' stories.

Visual artist Thomas Rebischung played a key role in facilitating intercultural dialogue and creating lasting legacies.

This was most powerfully embodied in the co-creation of two murals: one in the Flanades district of Sarcelles, France, and one in Hernádszentandrás, Hungary. These were not parallel acts but a connected process. The mural in Sarcelles has become a permanent public symbol of the hip-hop values embraced by CUC – Peace, Love, Unity, Having Fun. The reciprocal act of creating a mural in Hungary forged a visual dialogue, respecting each community's unique identity while making the exchange tangible and lasting. Thus, visual storytelling served multiple functions: to document, connect, and materially root

the project's shared narrative within both local contexts.

Because filmmaking was one of the project's main artistic methods, Mátyás Kovács and Dániel Széplaki in collaboration with Cheickna Wagué created a

documentary film as part of the entire process. An artistic outcome in its own right, it follows multiple parallel journeys: the artistic journey, the pedagogical and methodological development, the participants' personal transformation, and the project's evolution from conception to implementation. Beyond serving as a lasting visual memory for its participants, the film offers a unique perspective on the project's non-quantifiable impact: individual growth, emotional journeys, professional dilemmas, and shared moments of joy worth celebrating.



ARTISTIC OUTPUTS

The artistic journey of CUC culminates in multiple outputs that reflect the identities, exchanges, and imaginations of both communities:

- Participatory film (HU)
- A co-written, co-acted short fiction film created by Roma youth, rooted in their everyday environment.
- Hip-hop choreo-paint installation (FR)
- Large painted panels produced through dance movements, forming a collective visual archive of the Sarcelles hip-hop community.
- One-shot music video (HU/FR)
- Shot collectively in a single take, symbolizing unity, cooperation, and shared rhythm, featuring music composed by the CUC team during the sampling workshop.
- Mural exchange (HU/FR)



- Two murals created in each country acting as artistic "bridges" between the local communities.
- Documentary film (HU/FR)
- Serves as both artistic output and pedagogical tool, supporting future use of the methodology. This documentary:
- captures relational transformation;
- reflects ethical dilemmas of co-creation;
- gives voice to youth and ambassadors.



WHAT MAKES THIS METHODOLOGY INNOVATIVE

CO- OWNERSHIP

The CUC methodology introduces an original approach to socially engaged art by merging art practices with long-term community building. Artistic creation is treated as a shared journey rather than a performance delivered to an audience. This shift empowers communities to become co-authors of their own narratives, reinforcing identity and agency while ensuring that cultural expression remains accessible and relevant to everyday life. Its innovation lies not only in what was achieved, but in what was understood: how community ownership can emerge gradually through sustained engagement, and what structural elements are necessary for ambassadors to move from active participation to true co-creation.

EUROPEAN ADDED VALUE

The methodology's European value lies in its cross-sectoral design and intercultural collaboration. Artists, social workers, educators, institutions, and youth communities work together to generate knowledge that none could produce alone. The interaction between marginalized youth in Hungary and France revealed shared challenges and sparked mutual recognition across borders. These encounters demonstrate how cultural differences can become a source of empowerment rather than division, reinforcing a European identity grounded in diversity, solidarity, and co-creation.

CROSS- SECTORAL COLLABORATION

The relationship between the social workers and the artistic teams proved crucial for the project's success, especially given the inherent challenges. Social workers bring invaluable knowledge of the local context and work to establish relationships of trust and provide essential support for managing the demands placed on participants during the project and beyond. Their primary role is safeguarding and supporting the ambassadors.

The artistic teams and social workers collaborated closely to create safe environments that encouraged participants to step outside their comfort zones without exceeding their individual limits. This required constant communication and mutual respect for each other's expertise.

SCALABILITY AND ADAPTABILITY

Scalability and adaptability are central ambitions of the approach. The methodology is built on core principles of inclusion, trust, co-creation, and community-driven decision-making that can be applied across many different settings and contexts. While artistic tools, communication strategies, and group structures must always adapt to local realities, the ethical foundation remains constant.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CHALLENGES FACED

Supervision

In CUC, we learned that support structures must be actively requested and continuously maintained to be effective. Asking for help did not always feel easy or legitimate for team members and ambassadors, so emerging challenges were not consistently shared when they first appeared.

This experience revealed a crucial insight: planning for supervision is not enough. It must be embedded from beginning to end – normalized and encouraged as part of the process, made easily accessible, and prioritized in practice. Empowerment and care must grow together. And when the pace of artistic creation accelerates, reflection and support require even more attention. Otherwise, those who are most exposed may feel alone with responsibilities they are still learning to hold.

Ambassador method

Ambassador involvement was strongly influenced by the pace and structure of the project. Time constraints, emotional demands, and limited prior experience meant that ambassadors often participated more as learners than as co-

leaders. They contributed meaningfully and showed personal growth, yet their influence on decision-making and artistic direction remained limited. A key learning emerged: co-creation requires dedicated time, mentorship, and relational stability. Genuine leadership cannot be improvised; it must be prepared and supported from the outset.

Ambassadors, particularly as disadvantaged local youth, need gradual guidance to assume responsibilities safely and confidently. Their empowerment should include mental preparation, help in processing emotional experiences, and clearly defined expectations. Supporting them may require additional work hours from the social worker, but this investment is essential if ambassadors are to become trusted role models for younger peers. Multiple preparatory sessions can help build a shared ambassador identity and clarify the skills required. After each group session, follow-up meetings should reinforce wellbeing, provide conflict guidance, and strengthen motivation, self-reflection, perseverance, and communication.

Also, future iterations should strengthen ambassador capacity-building from the outset to ensure that the project can rely more heavily on community-led processes.

Dialogue and reflection

Further lessons emerged during the first part of the Creation Camp in Paris. A misalignment regarding the first week's objectives exposed a lack of communication and mutual check mechanisms among the partners, and the importance of reaching an early agreement on shared intentions. In addition, a dense schedule left little room for rest, informal exchange, or structured reflection. This revealed that co-creation requires pauses as much as activity: dialogue circles, feedback sessions, and peer-to-peer moments are essential for sustainable collaboration. The core takeaway is clear: present plans early for partner feedback and build dedicated reflection time into every co-designed schedule. Only by protecting space for communication, care, and shared decision-making can communities grow into the leadership roles that participatory methods aspire to create.

Community skills development

The transfer of skills toward wider community ownership remained modest, as ambassadors were still consolidating their own learning. Their position between the artistic team and the community proved emotionally demanding and sometimes ambiguous: without clear structures of support and autonomy, they could not fully step into the leadership role initially envisioned for them.

The goal is not to transfer artistic tools temporarily, but to anchor them locally so that confidence, cohesion, and creative initiative can endure. When participants are able to tell their own stories, transform their environments, and generate new ideas without external intervention, cultural participation becomes part of everyday life. Sustainability therefore relies on enabling communities to continue creating beyond the project, not on producing a single artistic outcome.



SUCCESS FACTORS

Despite these challenges, the experience also revealed several success factors that shaped the project's strongest moments. The involvement of associated partners and local mediators provided continuity, trust, and cultural understanding. Above all, long-term relationship building emerged as the foundation of sustainable impact. Where trust deepened, co-creation flourished naturally, and communities remained motivated to continue the work.

Other key success factors included:

- The Milan training, which established a shared language and laid the ethical groundwork that guided the entire process;
- A multidisciplinary artistic approach – even if somewhat too ambitious when combined across the two teams



– ultimately created space for every participant to find an entry point that matched their abilities and confidence levels;

- The creation of tangible, lasting artistic artifacts (films, murals, and panels) that the communities can proudly point to, revisit, and recognize as evidence of their own artistic journeys;
- The international exchange as a transformative learning experience;
- Honest reflection, continuous professional growth, and a reinforced commitment to doing the work even better next time.

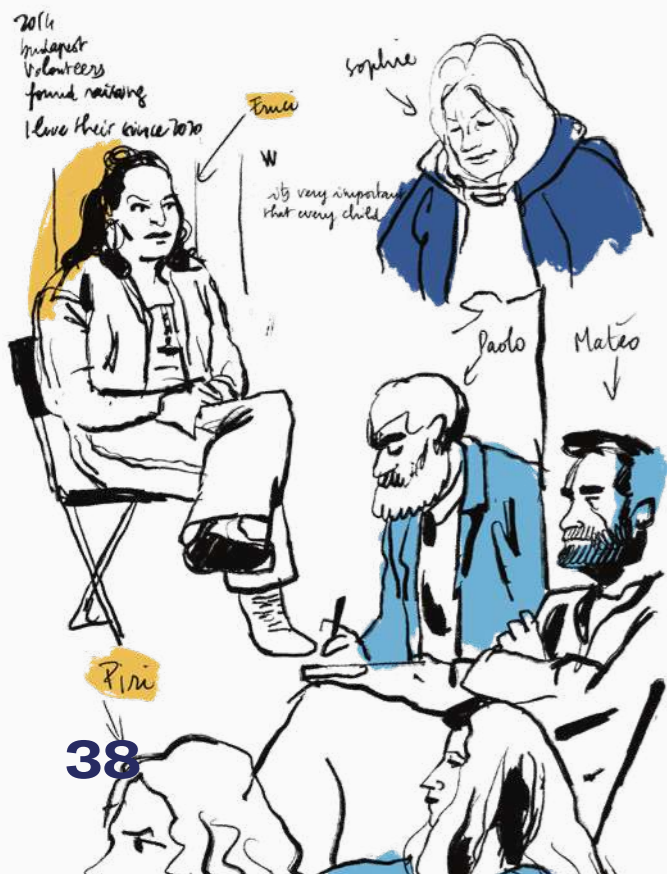
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROJECTS

From these learnings, CUC offers the following key recommendations for future initiatives:

- **Prepare with intention and humility:** Before entering a community, artists should take time to understand context, expectations, and power dynamics, with the support of a local mediator.
- **Recognize the multiple layers of relationship-building required for meaningful collaboration:** Attend trust-building at every level (within each local team, between artists and participants, among ambassadors in both countries, and across the entire international partnership etc).
- **Prioritize emotional safety and recognize limits:** Facilitators should remain attentive to signs of fatigue, withdrawal or resistance and seek

support whenever wellbeing is at risk.

- **Less is more:** Too many activities leave little space for rest, emotional processing and reflection. Without moments to slow down or simply be together, the deeper relational work that community art relies on cannot unfold.
- **Strengthen supervision and support structures:** Support should not only depend on individuals asking for help; it must be normalized, scheduled, and easily accessible.
- **Invest in ambassador development:** Future iterations of this methodology should strengthen preparation, supervision, and time dedicated to ambassador-led initiatives, so that acquired skills can translate into action within their communities.
- **Embrace co-creation as a shared process:** Successful projects rely on humility, clarity, and flexibility: co-creation means relinquishing control, allowing communities to define outcomes, and embracing learning as part of the artistic process.
- **Let trust guide pace and process:** When trust comes first, creative results follow – and they last longer.



SUSTAINABILITY AND CONTINUATION

For the work of CUC to continue meaningfully, communities must feel ready to take ownership of their creative practices.

Sustainability depends on the competencies developed throughout the project and on the motivation of ambassadors to remain cultural catalysts in their environments.

Providing communities with accessible tools, networks, and opportunities for visibility helps maintain momentum and prevents the work from fading once external funding ends.

CUC encourages further learning through documentation, shared methodologies, and training resources that can be used independently. Partnerships between organisations also form a long-term ecosystem where new exchanges and collaborations can emerge.

While ambassadors are still consolidating their skills, the project has strengthened motivation, confidence, and relationships that can support continued engagement. Sustained collaboration with local organisations will remain essential during this transition.

CONCLUSION

The CUC project contributes to a contemporary understanding of community as something continuously built through shared experiences, creative collaboration, and collective care. It demonstrates that communities are not defined solely by geography or identity, but by the relationships people choose to strengthen.

Using art as a tool for connection rather than an end in itself, CUC fosters participation, pride, and belonging, empowering young people to become active contributors to their cultural environments.

As a call to action, this methodology invites artists, educators, and community builders to rethink their role: not as providers of solutions, but as partners in discovery. To work with communities means to listen first, to accept uncertainty, and to value every step of the process – even the difficult ones – as opportunities for growth.

The legacy of CUC lies not only in the artistic outcomes achieved, but in the individuals and communities who continue to create, care, and connect long after the project has ended.

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Gatekeeper

Gatekeepers are key figures within a territory who possess a recognized authority and influence. These individuals or groups hold the “keys” to certain processes and changes in the community. Their role is critical in unlocking the potential for change or blocking progress. They are essential to forming alliances and creating enabling conditions for capacitating and contributive territories and communities.

Ambassador

In community projects, an ambassador acts as a bridge between the project and the community, ensuring active participation, trust-building, and mobilization around shared goals. They help represent the community’s needs and advocate for their inclusion in decision-making.

Community representative

A person who brings the voice, values, and needs of their community into external contexts, without necessarily having an active role in facilitation or co-creation.

Co-creator

An active participant who contributes to the artistic, methodological, and narrative decisions of the project, not only by executing but also designing.

Artist

A professional who facilitates collective creative processes, shifting their role from “producer” to “facilitator and co-learner,” placing their artistic skills at the service of the community.

Key Competencies for Ambassadors

During the training week in Milan, the team identified a set of community-focused skills that would guide the development of Ambassadors, listed here in descending order of importance:

- **Building trust:** Establishing and maintaining strong relationships based on mutual respect and reliability.
- **Active listening:** Understanding and valuing diverse perspectives.
- **Cultural empathy:** Embracing cultural diversity and fostering inclusion.
- **Conflict mediation:** Managing tensions and fostering resolution through dialogue.
- **Creativity and innovation:** Developing new approaches to community challenges and opportunities.
- **Strategic thinking:** Aligning community aspirations with broader project goals.
- **Collaborative leadership:** Inspiring and guiding teams with a shared vision.
- **Effective communication:** Articulating messages clearly and persuasively across diverse audiences.
- **Managing power dynamics:** Ensuring equitable participation within groups.
- **Event and activity organisation:** Planning impactful initiatives that mobilize communities.
- **Group facilitation:** Guiding productive and inclusive discussions and decision-making processes.
- **Digital platform management:** Leveraging online tools to enhance communication and engagement.

These profiles represent the ideal outcomes we strive for. Ambassadors are not expected to possess all these competencies at the outset, rather the program is designed to provide opportunities for Ambassadors to develop and grow in these areas.



Community Builders
Under Construction

METHODOLOGICAL BOOKLET

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