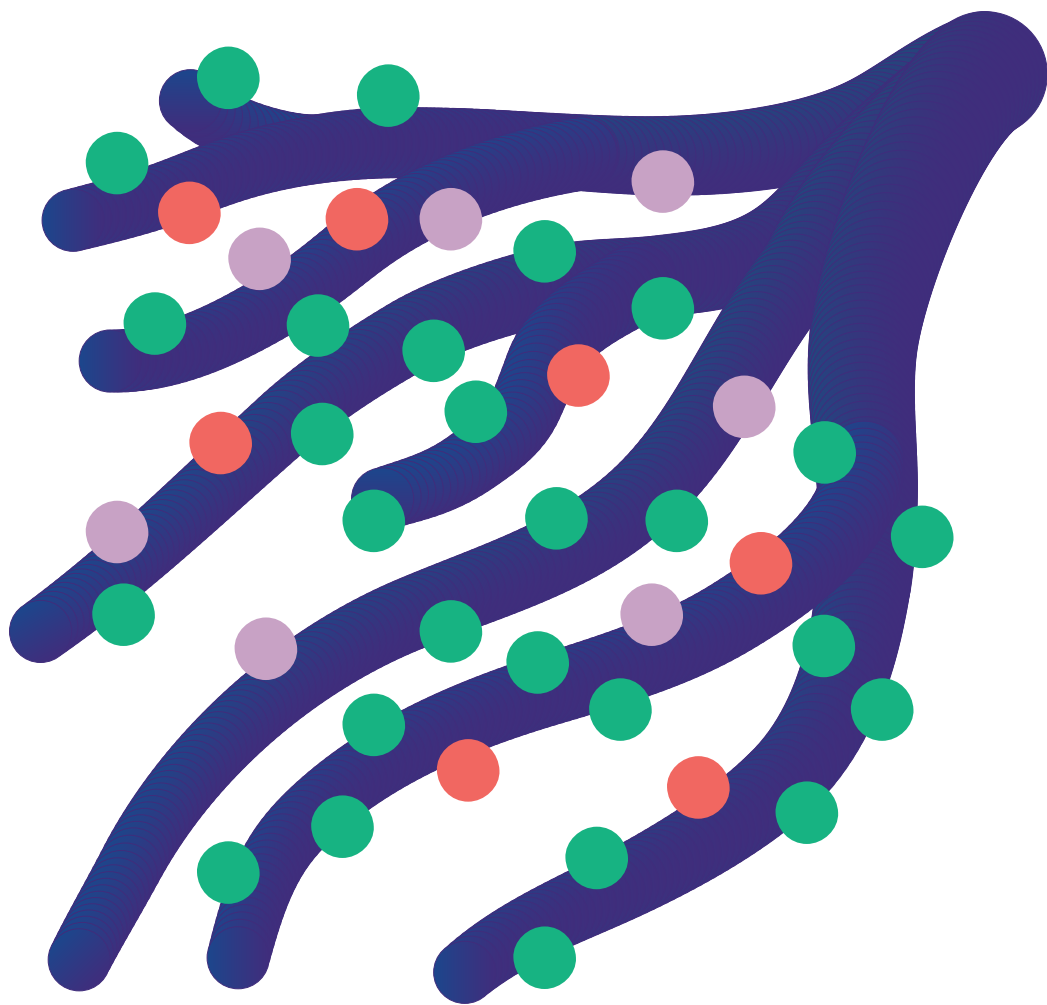




We Care, We Move, We Stay

A Handbook
of Transversal Solidarity

IMPRINT

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We Care, We Move, We Stay

**A Handbook
of Transversal Solidarity**

All across Europe, social movements have mobilized at the local level in the fight for a better world. Yet, if we look at the political conjunctures of the 2020s, there seems to be little reason for hope. Not only has society in the Global South long been in a state of permanent crisis, but European societies are also increasingly affected by multiple crises that feed off each other: We are experiencing the rise of a new authoritarianism, war in Ukraine and genocide in Palestine, a worsening climate crisis, austerity measures and increasing social inequalities and divisions. We are also witnessing a crisis in housing and care, in migration politics and in increasing levels of racism and repression against migrants — which in turn as well as within the very institutions of established democratic regimes. Faced with these multiple crises and the declining hope in the capacity of political institutions to address them, people become increasingly apathetic, retreating into social isolation as their living conditions worsen. Others (about one third of the European electorates) become entangled in right-wing ideologies that exploit and escalate these very crises.

Against this background, critical analyses that spotlight these grievances and that question these social conditions are crucial. Drawing on such analyses, this handbook — as well as its affiliated research project *Enacting Citizenship and Solidarity in Europe ‘from below’* (ECSEuro) — aims to understand how these conditions are already being actively challenged by different types of social movement organizations.

Despite the regressive dynamics of the 2020s, the deepening multiple crises are not only intensifying inequality and exclusion, but also fostering new horizontal forms of political organizing. This phenomenon is emerging in various urban places and spaces across Europe and beyond, inspiring a sense of possibility. In Hamburg, for instance, refugee women with precarious legal status and welfare recipients with German passports are jointly taking to the streets to address their specific struggles while simultaneously articulating a common demand: housing for all. This is only the tip of the iceberg of their broader political organizing, which focuses on empowerment and mutual support in everyday struggles are recognized as shared issues through collective gatherings. Similarly, residents in Palermo and Florence are engaging in healthcare practices from below, while also struggling to re-inhabit their neighborhoods — making them livable again despite the dynamics of displacement and austerity — and to make public space and housing available to all. In Copenhagen and other Danish cities, citizens are fighting against the racist stigmatization of their neighborhoods and national displacement policies. In Switzerland, battles are being fought in Zurich and Bern for infrastructures that support caring cities, while in the

Slovenian capital of Ljubljana, solidarity is enacted within the local community to secure migrant housing. In Maribor, citizens are gathering to discuss common policies and foster meaningful urban participation. Although these initiatives are only loosely connected, they reflect a renewed attention to politics rooted in everyday experiences — scaling up to address systemic discrimination by enacting their desired

Info Box: ECS-Euro

In the research project, Enacting Citizenship and Solidarity in Europe “From Below”: Local Initiatives, Intersectional Strategies, and Transnational Networks [ECSEuro], we asked ourselves how local political initiatives across Europe enact citizenship and solidarity, and thus contribute to the vision of a more democratic Europe from below.

To answer this question, we conducted eleven city-based case studies across Europe, focusing on the social fields of migrant rights, housing, and care work. The late 2010s, when we started developing the ECSEuro research project, marked the end of a decade that had started with a surge of hope in view of emerging movements in public squares, refugee protests, and feminist mobilizations across the globe. At the time we were inspired by the approaches of sanctuary and solidarity cities, which were developing across Europe in a bid to build local alliances of social movement organizations with municipal institutions, in opposition to the anti-migration politics present on national and supranational scales.

A paradigmatic case has been Barcelona, described by the former city council as ‘a caring, welcoming city that has established itself as a refugee city’. With the ECSEuro project, we wanted to find out to what extent urban approaches can provide an alternative to the Europe of nation states; to what degree local initiatives of transversal solidarity and horizontal citizenship can spread across social fields, places and scales. Please visit our website for publications and further information about the project:

<https://europefrombelow.net/output>

(See Link Reference 1 in Link Tree)



world through their own activities. In our research, we delved into the intersections between these urban struggles against bordering, privatization and commodification, highlighting what we can learn from these movements.

The cases presented in this handbook and ECSEuro project point to different spaces of possibility. They are not only raising, to quote Robert Musil, a clear “sense of reality”, but also sharpening our “sense of possibility” by reflecting on the potential for social change based on existing conditions. In this way, we are inspired by the emancipatory aspirations of social movements and the “radical imaginations” they express (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014). Their ability to build collective power on a broader scale may seem limited. However, they enact forms of solidarity and horizontal citizenship that can trigger social transformations in multiple places and alter our perspectives on society and cohabitation.

The following pages express our attempts to put the notion of spaces of possibility into practice. Our goal was to facilitate a dialogical process of collaborative knowledge production, bringing together the various initiatives already engaged through the ESCEuro research project, alongside many others affiliated with them. We aimed to create a space where these initiatives could come together and nurture one another by fostering their mutual connections. In collaboration with the School of Transnational Organizing of European Alternatives, the Transurban Solidarity Lab was born — a collaborative learning program which, over the time span of 9 months, brought together 40+ activists, workers and organizers active in the fields of care work, migrants’ rights and housing struggles from 15 different cities across Europe, providing the opportunity to connect to build and strengthen solidarity.

The program was designed to co-create a space where participants could engage with fellow comrades from similar and intersecting struggles and centered around different geographical locations to discuss, reflect on and envision how best to harness the power of translocal and transversal networks and alliances. Throughout multiple online exchanges, which culminated in a 3-day transnational gathering in Berlin, participants compiled a wealth of collective knowledge, based on their shared experiences from past challenges and victories, current actions and campaigns and future plans and radical imaginations.

The handbook you hold in your hands is one of the outputs of this process. Assembling a collection of 20 contributions collaboratively produced by the participants, it seeks to provide a variety of different answers to the overarching questions at the heart of the Transurban Solidarity Lab: what can similar initiatives based in different localities learn from one another? And, how can we connect our individual struggles? Each contribution offers a different approach to this theme, drawing from the diverse perspectives, lived experiences and skills of its authors. Together they form a

collectively crafted resource containing insights, examples, methodologies and strategies in political organizing, shared by the activists, organizers and workers who took part in this project, to inspire others.

While curating this publication, we were presented with a rich and diverse collection of contributions, each of which was rooted in particular transnational or local contexts. Yet despite their differences, each contribution resonated with shared struggles, hopes and forms of resistance. Rather than imposing a rigid framework, we chose a fluid, interactive approach to curation that reflects the particularities and interconnections of the experiences shared within these pages. Three broad thematic sections emerged: Voices at the Frontlines, Creativity in Resistance, and Tools for Organizing Solidarity.

These categories are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive — many contributions could belong to more than one. However, they offer a way to navigate the multiplicity of narratives and strategies explored throughout the handbook.

I. Voices at the Frontlines

This section centers the lived experiences of those most directly impacted by the intersecting crises of our time that span across our three fields of focus: deportations and border regimes, systemic racism, housing injustice, healthcare inequalities, care deficits and the erosion of democratic participation.

Here, solidarity is not abstract; it is something that emerges from concrete struggles, shared risks, and collective action. These contributions reveal how struggle is grounded in everyday life — at times painful, at times hopeful, and always deeply political.

Contributions in this section include harsh realities, from Danish deportation centers, evictions in Georgia, migrant organizing in Berlin's Oranienplatz, to grassroots resistance in Hamburg, Copenhagen, and beyond

II. Creativity in Resistance

Art, music, poetry, and visual storytelling can serve as tools for resistance, healing, and connection. This section explores how that happens. From murals and soundscapes to protest poetry and collective painting, these contributions show how creative practices enable people to reclaim space, voice, and visibility — especially those marginalized by dominant narratives.

Here, creativity is neither a luxury nor solely performative; it is integral to how communities organize, remember, and imagine otherwise. These pieces celebrate how cultural production sustains resistance, strengthens existing bonds and fosters belonging.

III. Tools for Organizing Solidarity

Lastly, this section focuses on the practical dimensions of organizing: the methods, strategies, and infrastructures that make movements resilient and sustainable. Whether through mapping, flyers, collective schools, or everyday practices of care, these contributions share tools that have emerged through lived experiences — tools intended to be shared, adapted, and reimaged in other settings and contexts. They point toward ways of building power and connection across difference, space and time.

The cover of this handbook seeks to represent the ways in which these struggles interconnect: like a river that branches out from and into different directions like a rhizome, they flow into each other, sometimes in seemingly chaotic ways, yet still forming part of an organic whole that makes sense when we situate ourselves within their individual perspectives. These categories and the respective contributions are, above all, an invitation: to journey into these different perspectives, to explore, connect, learn, and make use of what resonates within your own context.

We hope that this handbook serves not only as a record of what has been achieved, but as a living resource for what is yet to come.

Further Reading on the Enacting Citizenship & Solidarity in Europe “From Below”

- Pajnik, M., H. Schwartz, D. della Porta, F. Bernhard, M. Ribač. 2025. “Framing solidarity in times of multiple crises: Social movements across European cities”. Palgrave. OpenAccess: <https://link.springer.com/book/9783031825620>
- Schwartz, H., della Porta, D., Jørgensen, M. B., Pajnik, M., & Schilliger, S. (forthcoming). “Enacting Citizenship and Solidarity: Urban Struggles on Migration, Housing, and Care in Europe”. Bristol University Press.
- Radical democracy — How grassroots movements lead to solidarity and problem solution. <https://www.volkswagenstiftung.de/en/news/story/radical-democracy-how-grassroots-movements-lead-solidarity-and-problem-solution>
- Please visit europefrombelow.net for more publications and outcomes.

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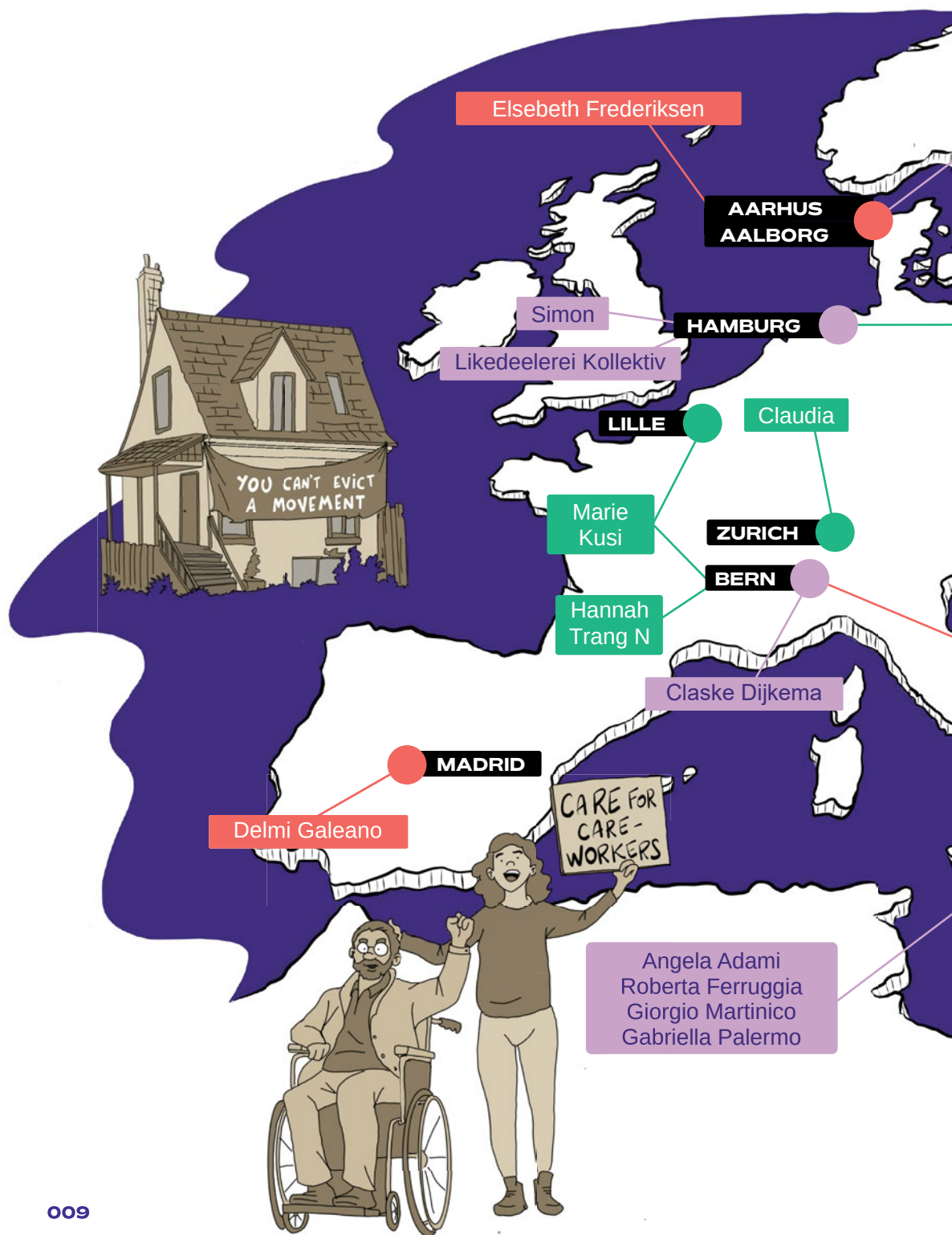
We Are One
Words That Walk
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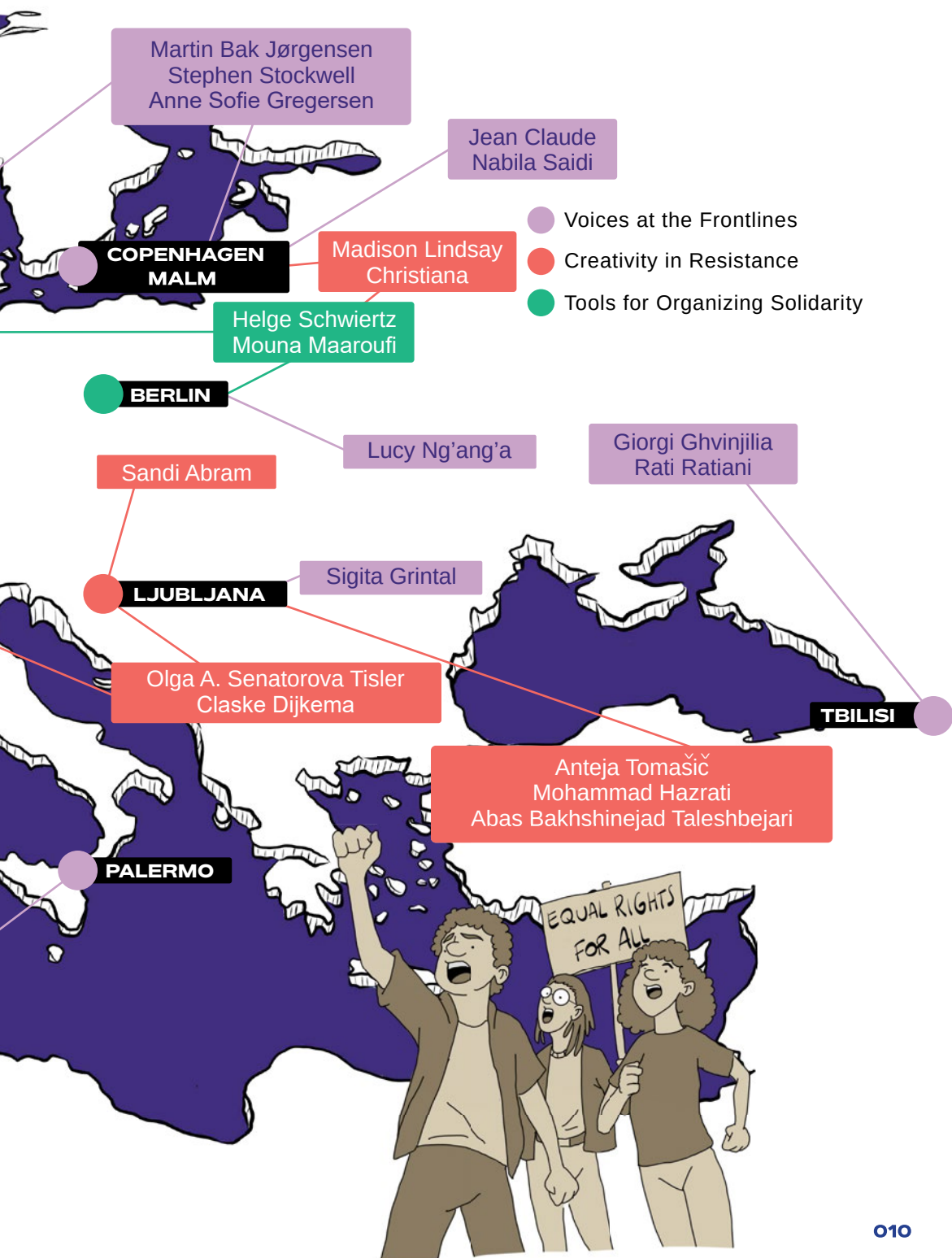
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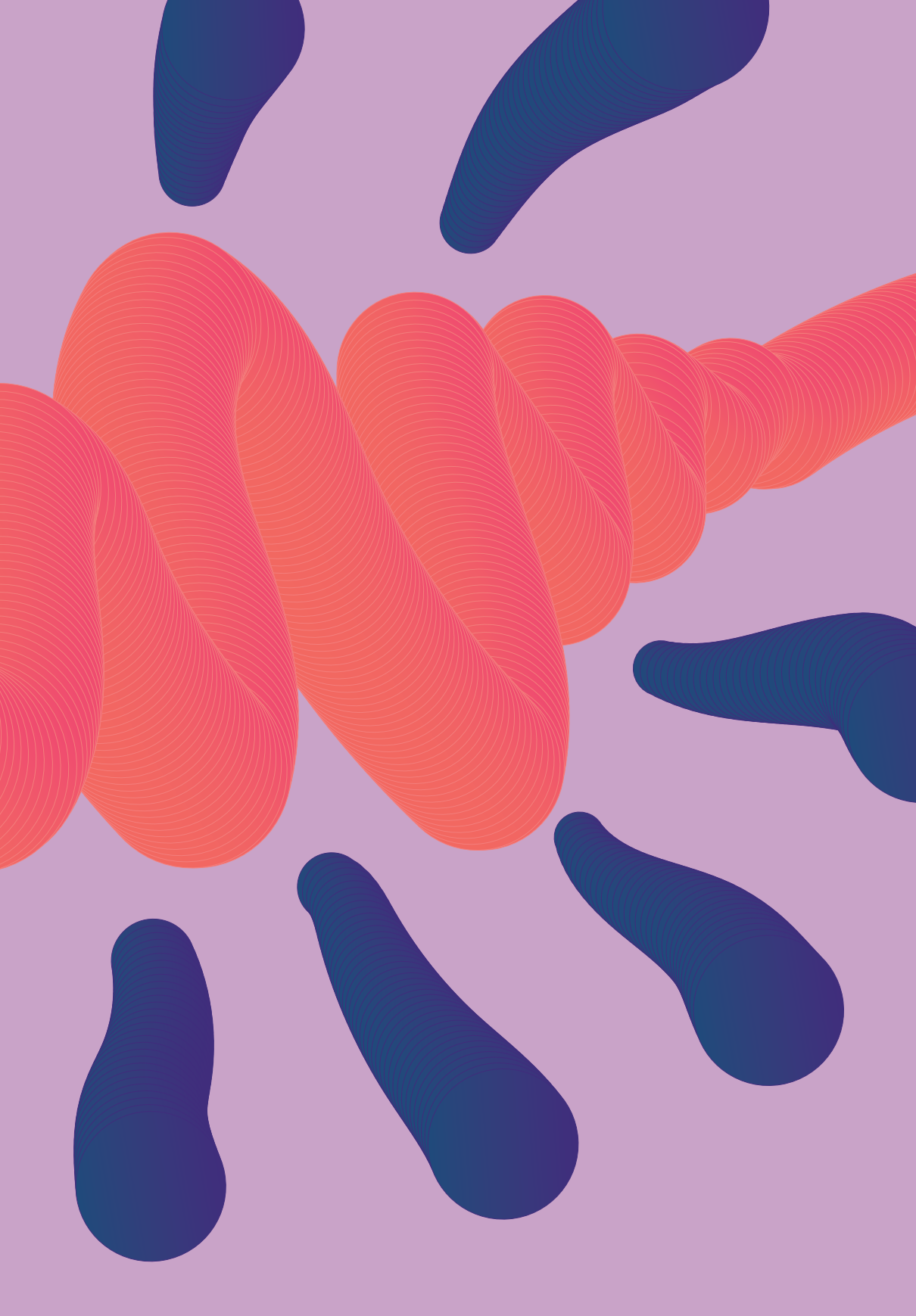


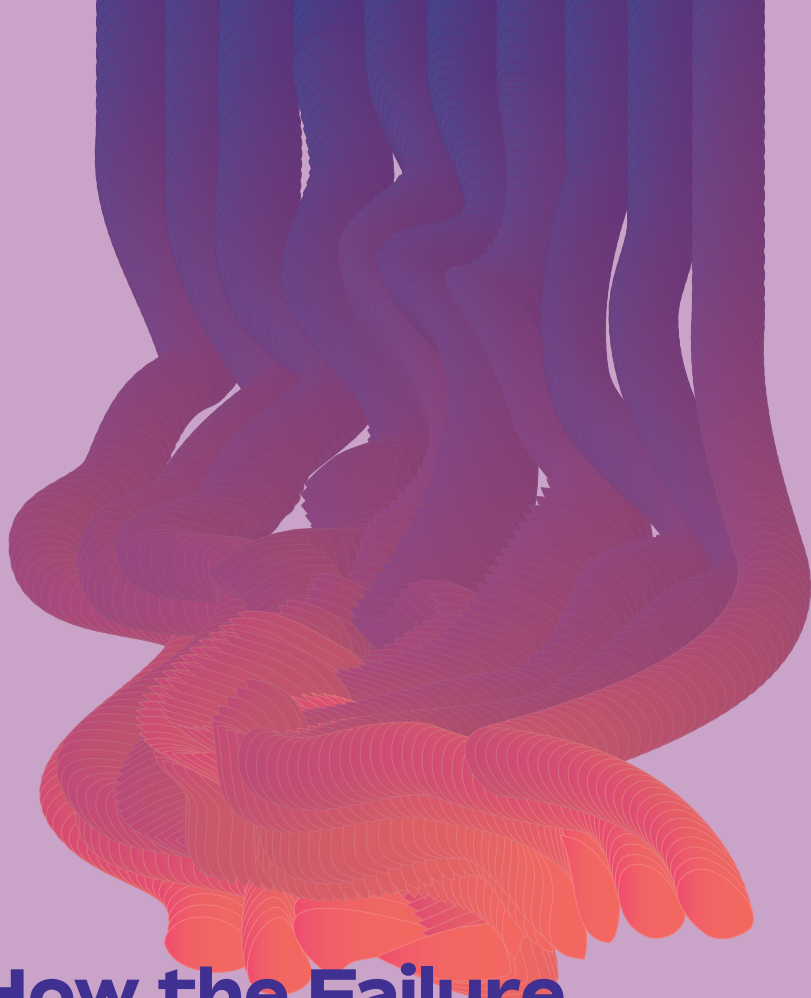


The background is a solid light purple. It features several organic, teardrop-like shapes in a dark blue color. A prominent, wide, wavy band in shades of orange and red runs diagonally across the lower half of the image. The text is positioned on the left side, partially overlapping the orange band.

I.

**Voices
from the
Frontlines**





How the Failure of Democracy Leads to Trauma

**Case of the Asylum System
in the EU Countries**

Jean Claude
Mbombo Mangomba
Nabila Saidi

Trampoline House
Malmö & Copenhagen

Overview

Migration is one of those human practices that can be traced throughout the human experience, from the past to the present.

The desire for freedom of movement has marked human societies throughout history. However, the realities of migration today reveal the unequal relations between the poor and the rich, the North and the South, the West and the rest of the world.

The vast majority of displaced people today (refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, internally displaced persons) are from formerly colonized countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America.

Why do People Seek Asylum?

Most forcibly displaced people are the result of persecution, armed conflicts, violence, war, human rights violations, climate change and poverty.

Only a small percentage of migrants and refugees reach the global North.

The Asylum System in the EU & the Traumatization of Asylum Seekers & Migrants

When asylum seekers and migrants reach the Western countries, they face militarized borders, armed border guards, indefinite detention in prisons and camps, precarious working conditions, minimal or no access to social services, decriminalization, racism and the constant threat of deportation.

This means that when asylum seekers, refugees and migrants are trying to cross the borders into EU countries, “THE BORDERS CROSS THEM”, instead. Borders were and continue to be colonially drawn, constructed and made to distinguish US (Europeans, Whites, Westerners) from THEM (non-Europeans, non-Whites, non-Westerners). With borders, the West limit freedom of movement, and in that sense they limit the space of people’s dreams and aspirations.

With borders, Western governments have created what W.E.B Dubois calls the “COLOR LINE”. This border is invisible.

The color line invented the distinction between the colonizer and the colonized. The border is an invention with deep material and existential consequences.

The notion of borders creates two different zones of people living in the same world, place or country — what Frantz Fanon called a “ZONE OF BEING” and a “ZONE OF NON-BEING”.

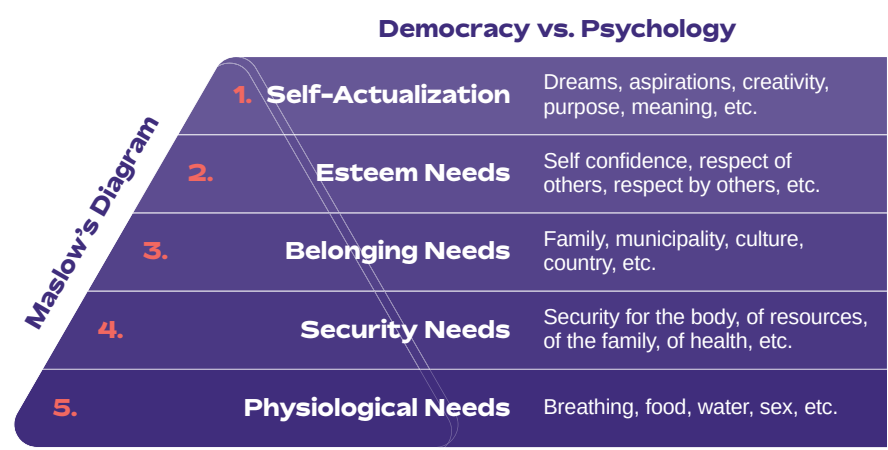
BELONGING

It is not always easy to talk about the notion of “BELONGING”, as it is a huge and very complex term to define and to develop.

During my research on traumatized asylum seekers, I have tried to compare the diagram of the American psychologist Maslow, who based his research on the basic needs of human beings.

The lack of coverage of those basic needs leads to trauma in asylum seekers, refugees and migrants living in EU countries.

Here is Maslow’s diagram:



Maslow said that among all those needs, “Belonging” is the one that creates most problems in the Western world.

Conclusion

When we try to define “DEMOCRACY”, one of its definitions is: the power of the people, for the people.

But this definition leads to one question:

Who are the people?

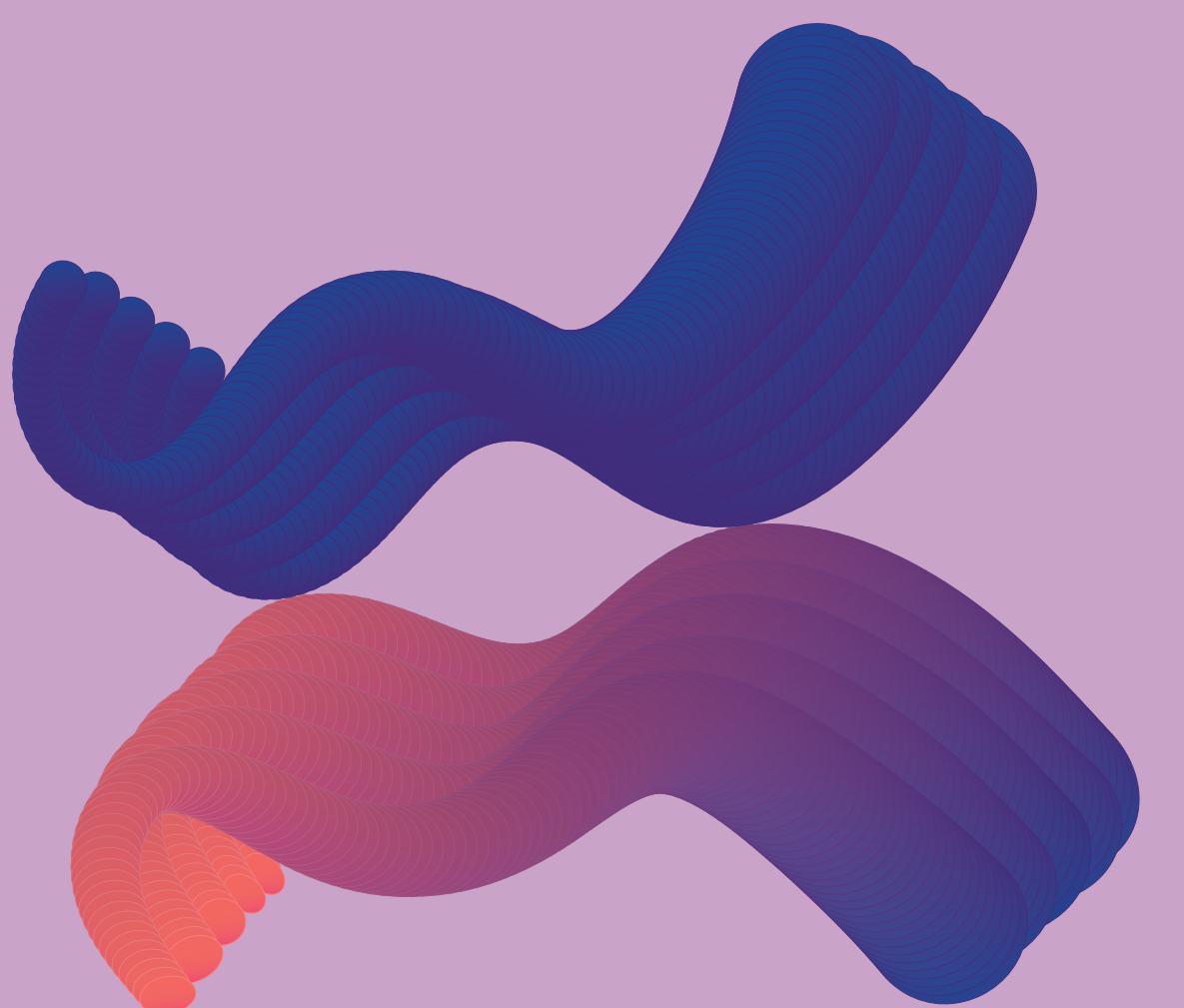
Are they the citizens of the country?

Or anyone living in the country?

Here come the two notions of the COLOR LINE and the BORDERS, which divide the Western countries into two parts as follows:

The Division of US vs. THEM in Most EU Countries		
US (Natives)		THEM (Foreigners)
Have Supra structures (EU, UN, Police, Immigration, Parliament, Frontex, etc) to defend them	1	Have no official structures to defend them
Impose the laws	2	Have to obey the laws
Have full rights	3	Have limited rights
Have power	4	Are powerless
Have a voice	5	Are voiceless
Are in the zone of being	6	Are in the zone of non-being
Human Beings	Color Line	Human Beings

We all have to take ACTION by considering that we all are human beings and have the same needs in life. In this way, the asylum system will be humanized and can move towards a better democratized system.

An abstract graphic featuring two hands, one blue and one orange, rendered with a wavy, layered effect. The hands are positioned as if they are about to clasp or are in a gesture of reflection. The background is a solid light purple.

Reflections on Activism

**On & Within Deportation
Centre Ellebæk**

Anne Sofie Gregersen

Martin Bak Jørgensen

Stephen Stockwell

Mandagsgruppen & ECSEuro Researcher Team
Aalborg & Copenhagen

The Danish Asylum & Camp System

In September 2015, Denmark had 47 asylum centers. That number grew to 98 during the 'long summer of migration'. Most of these were located in Jutland and 16 were placed on Fyn and Zealand islands. Many asylum centers were placed in peripheral areas, far away from the larger cities. Most are located in what is called 'udkants-Danmark' (outskirts of Denmark), deliberately keeping the asylum seekers away from the larger cities. Keeping asylum seekers away from public visibility has been defining for the Danish camp system, then and now in early 2025. Today, the number of camps has been reduced to 15, comprising one reception centre, three deportation centers, and two centers for (unaccompanied) minors.

In institutional language, the different centers have different names and functions: Asylum seekers in Denmark are typically accommodated in multiple centers during the processing of their applications. Departure centers are for individuals whose asylum applications have been rejected. Denmark operates departure centers to facilitate their return to their home countries. These include Sjælsmark Centre that houses individuals awaiting deportation, Kærshovedgård Centre that accommodates individuals pending deportation, and Ellebæk Centre that serves as a detention facility for individuals awaiting deportation. The centers for deportation are formally termed 'departure centers', but in practice serve to house deportees who are kept there under prison-like conditions.

Upon arriving in Denmark, the first destination for any asylum seeker (excluding quota refugees) is Sandholm, the reception centre located 30 kilometers north of Copenhagen. Here, the newly arrived asylum seekers undergo registration by the police. In the case that asylum is refused, the asylum seeker needs to leave Denmark within seven days. Those unwilling to leave Denmark voluntarily are often accommodated in one of the deportation centers. The Danish government has, moreover, implemented so-called "motivational measures" in the deportation centers to make their stay as challenging as possible, aiming to motivate individuals to leave Denmark as soon as possible.

The motivational measures target rejected asylum seekers who cannot be deported, as well as immigrants living in Denmark on "tolerated stay". Deportability, regardless of it being effectuated or not, has become a central element of the Danish immigration framework. Not only has Denmark stepped up on deportations, but we can also see an expansion in the groups the state wants to deport. Danish authorities have undertaken

a shift in emphasizing temporary protection, and with this turn we have seen a launch and effectuation of large-scale cessations assessments, revoking the residence permit of refugees by ending their temporary protection. Although it is difficult to find any official confirmation, Denmark already tried to reach an agreement with Somalia in 2017 to accept the return of rejected asylum seekers and Somali national whose temporary residence permit had been revoked. In 2023, the residence permits of more than 700 refugees, primarily from Somalia and Syria (around 100), have been revoked. However, as Denmark has no formal deportation agreement with Somalia and rejects any diplomatic ties with Damascus, revocations of residence permits are not succeeded by actual deportations. These refugees, now lacking the legal recognition as such and the subsequent social rights, therefore remain on Danish territory and are transferred to deportation centers for an uncertain period.

Deportation regimes are not only set up to actually enforce deportation. Deportation is not the end-game; instead it is the constant expansion of who should be deported. Most political parties agree on the need to deport more people. Deportation is a central part of the immigration regime, and one whose function is not only to deport people, but to deter and prevent unwanted migrants from actually crossing the respective state borders. The message of wanting and taking a hardline approach on deportation goes hand in hand with pushbacks and the like: both transport the clear message “you are not welcome here”. Deportation has come to be seen as a central part of immigration law and as a tool for keeping people away that only remains effective if the efforts are strengthened and upheld.

Martin Bak Jørgensen

The Importance of Staying Close to the Cause

We, Anne Sofie and Stephen, started volunteering together at Ellebæk through a Red Cross initiative on improving the wellbeing of the residents. The workshops, spanning six sessions of two hours each with the same group of eight detainees, dealt with psychosocial concepts, such as conflict resolution, social connectedness and stress. The material offered us the chance to work closely with a group of men, who found themselves in an untenable situation. For the detainees, wholly cut off from the outside world, it offered a break from the monotony of their everyday life behind bars.

Through our previous work with refugees, we both found it easy to quickly establish a comfortable rapport with the detainees. However, after just a few visits it became clear

that we, as volunteers, were far from equipped with the skills needed for the task we were facing. The majority of the detainees were in such severe mental distress that their needs far surpassed our non-professional capabilities. Our sessions settled into a routine, and we seldomly needed to wrestle words from the participants. They were eager to share, and in almost all of their cases, we were the only outsiders they had to confide in. Refugees in general are the unheard members of our social fabric, all too often relegated to statistics that shed little light on the individual. The conditions these men found themselves in were the direct result of years of political one-upmanship in Denmark's drive to severely restrict, if not end, the granting of asylum. Whatever hopes they may have harbored for a new beginning had been displaced by a sense of betrayal and distrust, brought on by a system rigged against them. Ellebæk is not, as it is euphemistically labeled, an Immigration Center, but rather a prison, representing the merger of modern-day punitive justice and the asylum system.

Since the two of us had a very different introduction to the Danish asylum system, we were somewhat surprised by the conditions we found at Ellebæk. Stephen began volunteering at Sandholm in 2021, where he started a social café for newly arrived Afghan refugees. As time went by, Stephen began to have a more open and in-depth exchange with the refugees living there, who had fled their home countries for many different reasons, but many shared a sense of relief in being, at least momentarily, in a safe place. I often heard optimism from the people I spoke with, or at least a notion of hope. Although hope can be tempered by feelings of anxiety, the belief that a specific process will lead to a positive end can be a powerful and motivating factor.

One thing I've come to appreciate in the people at Sandholm is the desire and energy they come to embody in their bid for a better life. This is the reason why we, as a civilized society, need established asylum protocols in place. At Sandholm it is not the refugee policies that occupy my time. Instead, it is the relationships I've established with the residents that define my connection to the place.

Changing perspective to Anne Sofie's experiences. Other than my work at Ellebæk, I volunteer at Avnstrup, a Red Cross-administered camp set in the Danish countryside 50 km from Copenhagen. Here I organize social activities, both on location and outside of the centre. From the outside, Avnstrup appears to be an inviting place, surrounded by forests and lakes, and the grounds are dotted with plum and apple trees. Apart from the bucolic setting, the spatiality of Avnstrup represents a different story. It houses families whose asylum have been rejected. Some families live in these camps for over ten years. Their children are born there, grow up there, and speak fluent Danish.

Many of the families I engage with here remain positive about obtaining Danish residency; however, during my time at Avnstrup, I only know of one family that has been granted the right to stay. As families spend years living in the grey area between potential residency or deportation, many struggle with depression and chronic stress, and the young people I work with are no exception. There is an onsite school for children aged 6-16 years, and some of the children are able to attend the local public school. Once they have graduated primary school, some are offered courses on a monthly basis, but other than that, they have no right to ensure their further education.

While our work at Ellebæk has been challenging, the fact that we are some of the few volunteers onsite has kept us motivated to continue our visits. Through our sessions with the detainees, we are able to see the daily challenges they encounter. These include difficulties in staying in touch with their families and friends, inadequate medical treatment, and difficulty in maintaining their physical and mental well-being. It also became apparent to us that what they needed the most was precisely what the Red Cross couldn't offer: someone to advocate for them on an individual basis. Many sought help in understanding their legal predicaments, as they often lacked adequate legal representation. They expressed this need by asking us to reach out to journalists, media outlets, or anyone who could shed light on their situation. As we came to understand these needs of the detainees, we began helping them in any way we could; reading their documents, contacting their lawyers, researching the various Danish laws connected to their detainment, and more. The more we looked into it, the better we understood that this would need to happen within a different framework than the one provided by the Red Cross — a framework more closely tied to the actual needs of the individuals at Ellebæk.

Eventually, this propelled us to start our own volunteer organization, 'Mandagsgruppen' (English: Monday groups), which afforded us a space to work directly with the detainees' individual needs. This shift has enabled us to take an active role in attempting to better their conditions and advocate for their struggles. While we still are active in Ellebæk through the Red Cross, we feel Mandagsgruppen allows us to stay closer to the cause, namely fighting for the individual asylum seeker within an anonymous and unjust system.

We have already established contact with Ellebæk's administration and scheduled a meeting to discuss our own initiatives. Since the beginning of our visits at the centre, the social workers have been incredibly supportive, advocating for our continued presence at the facility. We aim to organize activities that we recognize as necessary,

including aid in the legal process and connecting detainees to resources upon their release. Already, we have been given a heads up to host dinners, offering the detainees homemade meals as an alternative to the processed food they are served daily. We have also outlined plans for a small outdoor herb garden maintained by the detainees, allowing them to leave their mark on Denmark, one seed at a time. These organic processes and shared experiences connect individuals, enabling practices of care to be transmitted across time at Ellebæk.

Stephen Stockwell & Anne Sofie Gregersen

Conversation with a Friend & Former Detainee at Ellebæk

I first met Elias (alias) in the fall of 2024. He spent nearly two months at the Ellebæk Center. During that time, we saw each other regularly every Monday.

I call Elias on a Wednesday afternoon. His friend, who has kindly agreed to translate, joins us in the online call. We greet each other with smiles and hand gestures towards the screen. The three of us have met before — shortly after Elias's release — when I visited him and his family at their home. Before I press record, we chat for a few minutes. Elias shares that he wants to conduct this interview for the detainees who are still held at Ellebæk.

I start the interview by asking him if he can tell me about his life before coming to Ellebæk.

Elias: I first got to Spain, after fleeing my home country, and after spending several years in Spain, I moved to Denmark. In the beginning, or for almost four years I would work in Sweden, as I didn't receive my work permit until 2020. After that, I got a really nice job in a kitchen. I was happy to go to work and pay my taxes. My wife and I had our daughter here in Denmark.

Anne: Can you tell me about the days leading up to your arrival at Ellebæk?

Elias: I was at work when my boss came and said that two men were here to see me. It was the police. They brought me to a station, I think it was in Bellahøj, I'm not sure. I was questioned for many hours. They kept asking for my real name. They said Elias wasn't my real name. I said I had used another once, but that Elias was my real name and after that they took me to Kastrup. The next day I went to Ellebæk.

Anne: What happened when you then arrived to Ellebæk?

Elias: It was horrible. I couldn't see my family.

Anne: Did they know where you were?

Elias: I talked to them on the phone. The one we shared in my department. I worked in the kitchen to get money to call them. For 100 DKK you could talk for 79 minutes. They tried to come to visit me and had filled out the documents five days before, as they had been told. When they got here they weren't let in. They [Department of Prisons and Probation] said they hadn't processed the document.

Elias' friend: I drove them there several times without them letting them in. It was a hard time for his wife.

Elias continues: The social worker there tried to help me pay the bill for my daughter's daycare, but it didn't work. It was very hard. He also helped me stop my payment for my unemployment insurance. It also didn't work. When I got out and after being fired for not coming to work for two months [being in Ellebæk], they couldn't help me. They could not pay me back for the two months.

Anne: How are you feeling now, being out of Ellebæk and back home with your family?

Elias: Physically I am good now, but mentally I am not good. I have trauma. My daughter has trauma. She still wakes up every night and cries for hours. She thinks I'm gone. It is not funny.

At Ellebæk, Elias would tell me how every time a neighbor walked down the hallway, his daughter would think it was Elias coming home. When I visited him and his family, I saw the close bond between the two. I remember that as he was walking me out of the building, his daughter followed him in tears. She clung to him, trying to hold on, making sure he wouldn't leave.

After being found not guilty in the District Court and released from Ellebæk, Elias received a letter from the High Court announcing the appeal of his case. He is still waiting for the court date and remains completely in the dark about the situation, and about why the system continuously pursues his conviction. By the time he received the letter and reached out to me, it was already too late to replace the lawyer who had represented him so far. The communication with Elias' appointed lawyer was

nothing but poor. Despite numerous attempts by all three of us, the lawyer never answered a single phone call.

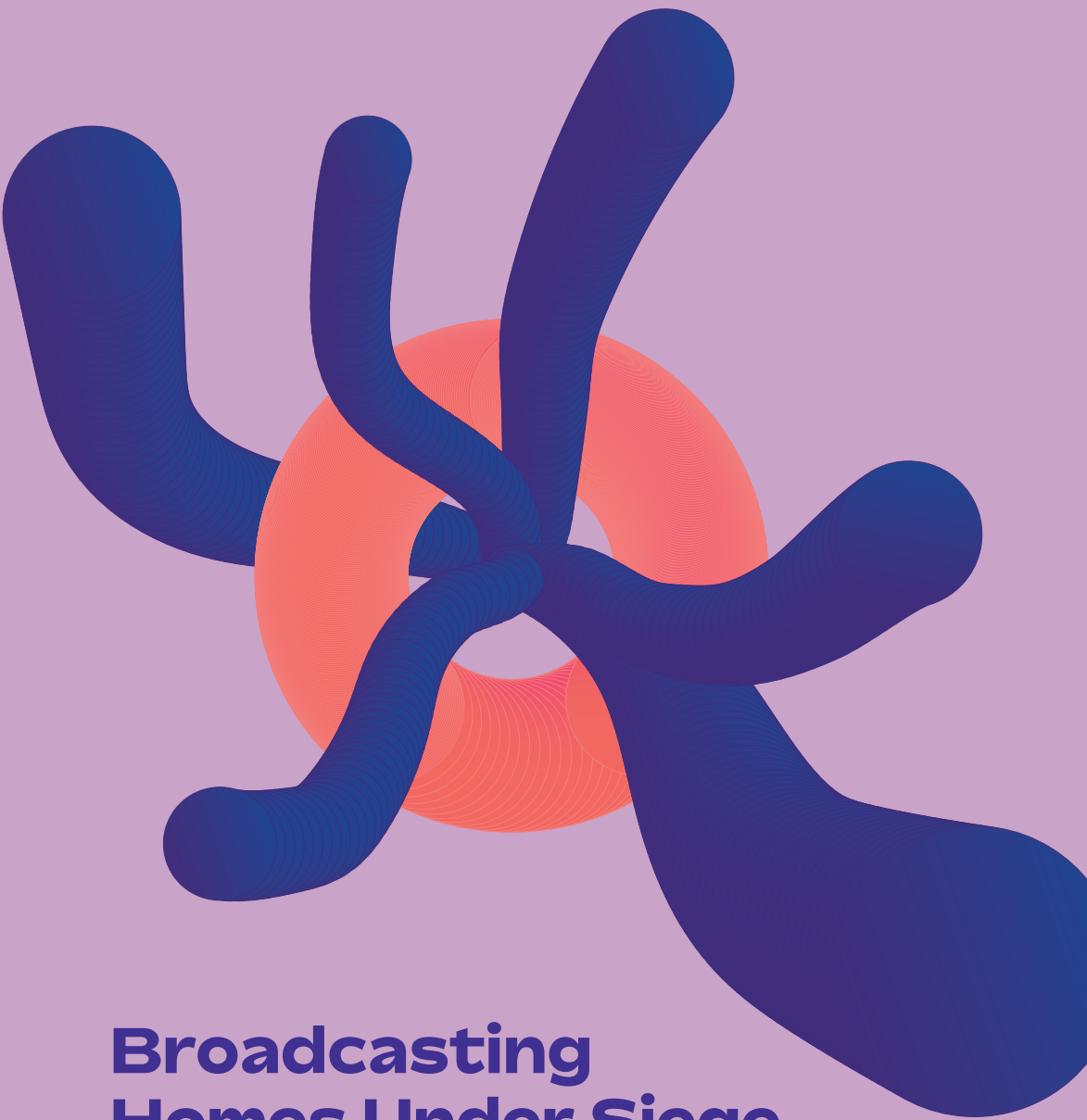
To help Elias with his situation and to better understand his initial placement at Ellebæk, we have requested access to his documents from the police. While the process was initiated more than 6 weeks ago, we are still waiting to receive the documents. Nevertheless, we remain hopeful that once we do receive them they will shed some light on Elias' situation. While it is a small effort, it is an important step in Elias' process of regaining autonomy.

Before we end, I ask if there is anything Elias wants to add to our conversation.

Elias: I used to like Denmark, I was so happy here, but I don't know anymore.

These feelings are all too familiar. Within the asylum system, refugees often face a future marked by protracted uncertainty, and sadly, it seems Elias isn't the exception. I tell him that I am very happy to have met him. While forming friendships and connections across Ellebæk's surrounding fences doesn't directly address the hostility of the Danish asylum systems, it is an important act of resistance against the hopelessness that often defines the experiences within it.

Anne Sofie Gregersen



Broadcasting Homes Under Siege

Evictions in Post-Soviet Georgia

Giorgi Ghvinjilia
Rati Ratiani

Housing Activists
Tbilisi

In the quiet suburbs of Tbilisi, the sight of moving trucks tells a troubling story. Families are packing their lives into boxes, leaving behind homes that once represented security, stability, and a sense of heritage. For many in Georgia, this is more than just a personal tragedy — it's part of a deeper narrative of systemic exploitation, social stigma, and quiet resistance.

Evictions are not just about losing a roof over one's head. They are struggles rooted in economic hardship and political neglect. Yet, amidst the despair, stories of resistance and solidarity emerge, offering glimpses of hope and the power of collective action.

It is we — neighbors, activists, journalists, and actors of grassroots resistance — who stand together against police forces, loan sharks, and capital grabbers. Through strategic opposition, coordinated action, and sheer determination, many families have been able to escape eviction and keep their homes. Yet, such resistance often spirals into protracted conflicts, stretching over months or even years, between residents and law enforcement.

While recent reforms removed police from direct eviction duties, the state's ability to enforce evictions remains intact, often through private security or other forces. All of this reflects the harsh reality of an escalating eviction crisis — a troubling consequence of Georgia's post-Soviet experimentation with neoliberal policies. Predatory lending, unchecked housing markets, and the lasting effects of economic restructuring have shown how fragile homeownership can be in a society undergoing constant, rapid change.

The Legacy of Soviet Homeownership

Under Soviet rule, housing was a cornerstone of state policy, viewed as a right rather than a privilege. Programs such as the 'Unified State Housing Fund' ensured that more than 90% of Georgians owned their homes by the late 1980s. Housing was a symbol of stability, provided as part of a social contract that emphasized collective welfare.

However, when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, this system fell apart. Georgia was thrown into chaos, with wars, mass displacement, and an economic crisis leaving the country in turmoil. Housing, which had once been a safety net, was now part of a market-driven economy that showed little mercy.

Privatization and neoliberal reforms transformed homes from social goods into commodities, something to be bought and sold rather than guaranteed. This left

people vulnerable to exploitation. Many families, once secure in their state-provided apartments, were left struggling to navigate a competitive housing market. Those displaced by civil wars and economic instability were hit hardest, often finding themselves homeless or living in inadequate conditions.

These changes set the stage for the eviction crisis that still impacts Georgia today.

Loan Sharks & the Catalyst of Crisis

From the very beginning of independence to the present day, Georgia has struggled with widespread unemployment and poverty. For many families, taking out a mortgage loan seemed like the only way to get by. They used their homes as collateral, often without realizing the risks. Loan sharks, often backed by influential political elites, took advantage of this desperation. They pushed for deregulated mortgage markets, which allowed families to use their homes as collateral under unfair and often unclear terms.

With high interest rates, hidden fees, and rigid repayment schedules, these loans quickly became financial traps. Many borrowers found themselves unable to keep up with payments and were forced to give up their homes. By 2018, Eurasianet reported that roughly 30% of Georgia's working population — around 630,000 people — were unable to repay their debts. Georgia had one of the highest lending rates in the world, a troubling sign of just how deeply financial exploitation had taken root. The most vulnerable groups — low-income families, single parents, and the elderly — were hit hardest, trapped in cycles of poverty they couldn't escape.

The human cost of Georgia's housing crisis is overwhelming. Entire neighborhoods in cities like Tbilisi and Batumi have experienced waves of evictions, forcing displaced families to move into rural areas or overcrowded shelters. In rural communities, where homes often represent a family's heritage, losing property has an even deeper emotional and cultural impact.

The effects of eviction go beyond losing a home. Families are often torn apart — children may be sent to boarding schools while parents desperately look for work or housing. Communities that once thrived on mutual support and shared bonds are broken, replaced by isolation and instability. At the same time, luxury developments and high-end real estate projects keep flourishing, often fueled by the same policies that force vulnerable families out of their homes.

According to a report by the Human Rights Centre, the eviction process in Georgia

is often opaque, with little transparency, and oddly unfair. Families are rarely given clear information or legal protections, leaving them with no compensation and no way to challenge the system.

The Stigma & Systemic Injustice of Evictions

Evictions in Georgia are not just financial tragedies — they carry a deep societal stigma that often forces families into silence and invisibility. Overwhelmed by shame, many families move out quietly, avoiding attention, as eviction is wrongly viewed as a personal failure rather than a consequence of systemic exploitation. This silence protects those in power, enabling a system where financial predators, many of whom hold prominent positions in parliament and opposition parties, operate unchecked. By keeping these stories out of the public eye, those in power hide the reality of a system designed to prioritize profits over people, turning housing into an investment for the few and a source of despair for the many.

The crisis is not limited to Tbilisi; cities like Batumi, Kutaisi, and Kobuleti, as well as rural areas, are affected by waves of evictions. In rural communities, homes are more than just shelter — they represent family heritage passed down through generations. Losing these homes is particularly devastating. Organizing resistance in these regions is also more challenging due to limited resources and logistical barriers, as it is harder to mobilize.

Yet, the spirit of solidarity remains strong, as families and neighbors quietly come together to protect one another, often resisting without drawing broader attention.

The real shame of Georgia's eviction crisis lies not with the displaced families but with the system that allows their suffering. Predatory lenders, many of whom hold significant political influence, have profited significantly from policies that prioritize wealth accumulation for the elite over the dignity and security of citizens. These injustices highlight the urgent need for collective resistance and systemic change, to challenge the structures that uphold inequality and exploitation.

Resistance from Below

In the face of systemic injustice, grassroots resistance has become a vital force against Georgia's eviction crisis. Across the country, communities are mobilizing to protect families at risk of displacement, showing the power of unity and collective

action.

Neighbors, in particular, are essential forces in this fight. When eviction notices are issued, it's often the neighbors who first hear the news. They spread the word through local networks, making phone calls, knocking on doors, and calling on others to act.

The response is simple: they show up.

These efforts often begin as small, local acts of solidarity. Neighbors who have lived side by side for years, who know each other's struggles, step in to protect one another. But this is not where the resistance ends. It has developed into something stronger: a grassroots resistance rooted in the shared understanding of injustice and the determination to fight back. This resistance isn't formal or centralized, but it is deeply connected. Members of these informal networks build a community of solidarity that grows.

In cities and towns, certain cafés, shared spaces, or even individual's homes have become hubs for this opposition. These spaces serve as meeting points where people from the community come together to share ideas, offer advice, and plan their next steps. Here, those with experience in resisting evictions guide others who are new to the fight, passing on what they've learned about organizing, legal appeals, and direct action. These spaces are more than meeting spots — they are places of trust, where people share ideas and where ideas turn into coordinated efforts.

On eviction days, this solidarity is put into practice. The streets fill with people. Furniture, chairs, and household items are carried into doorways to block access. Neighbors form human barriers, standing shoulder to shoulder at entrances, physically placing themselves in the way of enforcers. These acts are not just about saving homes; they are about resisting a system that leaves families to fend for themselves. Each act of defiance sends a clear message: no family should face eviction alone.

Journalists are also an integral part of these efforts, and they don't stand apart — they are part of the same grassroots resistance. Independent media platforms like the digital media platform *Mautskebeli* (Georgian: "broadcaster") are closely connected with these communities, contributing not just by documenting events but by amplifying the stories of those fighting back. The journalists of *Mautskebeli* attend eviction days, capturing the faces, voices, and struggles of those involved. They broadcast these stories online, ensuring the broader public sees the injustice for what it is. Without this coverage, these stories might remain hidden due to mainstream media's indifference.

Despite its limited financial resources, Mautskebeli has become one of the few spaces where these struggles are consistently told. The platform relies on online channels to share videos, analyses, and firsthand accounts of eviction resistance. It is an essential part of this collective effort, helping to expose the systemic injustices.

Meanwhile, mainstream media in Georgia is largely controlled by political parties — either those in power or opposition. These outlets prioritize content that serves their political agendas, ignoring critical social issues like the eviction crisis. As a result, the struggles of displaced families and grassroots movements are rarely, if ever, broadcast to a wider audience — leaving independent platforms like Mautskebeli as some of the only spaces where these stories can be told.

Despite limited resources and political resistance, grassroots organizers and independent journalists persist, making a crisis visible when powerful institutions prefer to keep it hidden. Together, they are breaking down the stigma surrounding evictions and challenging the structures that profit from human suffering.

Resistance comes from a collective of people — neighbors, friends, journalists — who share a belief that housing is a right and that no family should face this crisis alone, and from their tireless efforts to stand against a system.



Together We Rise

**Breaking Isolation,
Building Connection,
Cultivating Belonging**

Lucy Ng'ang'a

International Women* Space/ Break Isolation Group(IW*S/BIG)
Berlin

As refugees or asylum seekers, the sense of belonging is not just a desire but a lifeline — and this is exactly what the Break Isolation Group (BIG) of International Women* Space offers. “I am because we are” — the philosophy of Ubuntu inspires us to live with compassion, mutual respect, and an unyielding belief in the power of togetherness.

Through this spirit, we find strength in our survival, solidarity, and shared humanity. Community is not merely a structure; it is the meals we prepare and share, the laughter that echoes in moments of joy, and the burdens we lift together when challenges arise. With the Break Isolation Group, Ubuntu is not just an ideal but a way of living — a testament to the beauty of belonging and the enduring power of collective care. This interconnectedness keeps us resilient, reminding us that no one walks this journey alone.

We know that building and especially sustaining a community is not easy — it requires intention, effort, and commitment. As much as community brings joy and strength, it also calls for ongoing reflection and care. We all have much to learn about balancing personal well-being with collective responsibilities, especially when engaging in socio-political activism.

The challenges of navigating self-care and community care are compounded by the emotional toll of activism, the weight of burn-out, and the mental health burdens that arise from facing and witnessing systemic injustices. These realities remind us that nurturing a community means creating spaces where rest, vulnerability, and healing are valued alongside action. It calls for us to recognize our limits, support one another in moments of struggle, and continuously adapt our practices to ensure sustainability — for ourselves and the movements we are building together.

“Let’s take care of each other so we can be dangerous together.”

This statement reflects the core philosophy of the Break Isolation Group: solidarity as a source of strength, resistance, and empowerment. By prioritizing community and support, we create a foundation from which we can collectively challenge oppressive systems, amplify our voices, and demand justice.

At the heart of our work is the principle For Us By Us. As refugee women*, we are the ones who best understand the realities of our struggles and the solutions we need. Rather than relying on external voices to define our experiences or dictate our

futures, we take the lead in identifying, addressing, and resolving the challenges we face. This ensures that our organizing, advocacy, and community-building efforts are rooted in our lived realities and aspirations.

The Break Isolation Group is a space built by refugee women*, for refugee women* — both those still navigating the German asylum system and those who have passed through the system. Many of us live in accommodation centers (German:



Geflüchtetenlager, short: Lager) in Berlin and Brandenburg, where isolation and systemic barriers shape our daily lives. In response, we came together in February 2019 as a self-organized working group within International Women* Space.

Through peer-to-peer organizing, we foster self-representation, autonomy, and collective action. We create spaces where we can express ourselves freely, build our capacities, and directly influence decision-making processes. We reject the disempowerment of others speaking about us or on our behalf without our inclusion. When we support each other, we can be bold, we can be disruptive, and we can be dangerous together.

Lager Visits: Building Bridges of Solidarity

Lager visits were the group's first activity and remain an essential part of our work. These visits create direct connections between refugee women* inside and outside the

asylum system, fostering networks of solidarity and empowerment. We remind each other that we are not alone, that we are capable of taking action, and that collective organizing is a powerful tool for change.

The term *Lager* (“camp”) reflects the systemic, isolating nature of these spaces — often located on the outskirts of towns, heavily regulated with curfews, visitor restrictions, and security controls. We reject the official term *Heim* (“home”) because it



sugarcoats the reality of these accommodation centers and their oppressive, isolating function throughout colonial history. Accessing *Lagers* can be difficult, and in many cases, visits are only possible through an established contact woman* inside, who mobilizes others and secures a space for the gathering. In cases where access is prohibited — especially in reception centers — we organize meetings in nearby parks or cafés. However, this presents a challenge during winter!

A typical visit starts early in the morning, when the team meets at a central station in Berlin before traveling by train and bus, stopping along the way to buy snacks for the women* we are visiting. Depending on the distance and the often limited public transport on certain stretches, the journey alone can take several hours. Each visit is a full-day commitment, often extending into the evening, but the time spent together is invaluable. These visits are more than just meetings — they are acts of resistance, breaking through forced isolation and strengthening connection and community.



Ubuntu Soup Kitchen: Cooking to Give Back

Ubuntu, a term found in different Bantu languages such as Kiswahili and Zulu, embodies the philosophy of humanity towards others — “I am because we are.” The Ubuntu Soup Kitchen was initiated by BIG in 2022 and ran as a monthly event for two years, now happening quarterly. We came together to prepare and distribute warm meals to people in need — including people experiencing homelessness. More than just a food distribution project, it is a collective effort to build bridges, promote mutual respect, and fight against social injustices through solidarity and shared action. The idea came from a brainstorming session among women* in the refugee and asylum-seeking community, many of whom bring extensive knowledge, education, and skills that are often disregarded within the asylum system. Through this initiative, they can continue to use their culinary talents, preserve their traditions, and reclaim their agency. Cooking together not only provides sustenance, but also strengthens community and cultural exchange.



In the true spirit of Ubuntu, our goal is to create an environment where solidarity and compassion drive our collective action. We aim to cultivate connections, strengthen community

bonds, and uphold the dignity of all individuals. The cooking takes place at Bilgisaray o45 e.V. Kitchen, a non-commercial neighborhood hub in Berlin where people cook, eat, and build community together. The space embodies our values of openness, solidarity, and collective action. We prepare and distribute approximately 80 meals to families and individuals at designated distribution points, such as Fixpunkt at Kottbusser Tor and Görlitzer Park.

Fixpunkt e.V. specializes in health promotion, crime prevention and harm reduction for drug users, making them an essential partner in reaching vulnerable populations.

Kottbusser Tor and Görlitzer Park are located in the district of Kreuzberg, which has been a nucleus for migrant populations and political actions since the '60s and '70s when migrant workers, squatters and radicals moved into what was a neglected neighborhood on the border between East and West Berlin. Today, the district is home to many migrants from across the world, packed with diverse cultural life and experimental alternative scenes. Görlitzer Park is a large recreational park and is seen as one of the major drug distribution (buying/selling) locations in Berlin. Kottbusser Tor (also known as "Kotti") is registered as a so-called "*kriminalitätsbelasteter Ort*" (crime-ridden area). In both spots, because of these designations, the police are allowed to disregard certain laws. They are allowed to stop, search and surveil without any suspicion or cause, making racial profiling and police violence an everyday reality for the communities.

To ensure that our meals cater to diverse dietary needs, we focus on nutritious and inclusive dishes such as rice, beans, and a variety of vegetables. This not only accommodates different cultural preferences but also simplifies packaging and transportation.

Our Ubuntu core group consists of approximately seven refugee women* from BIG, who take the lead in mobilizing others from different Lagers to participate. During each cooking session, we tend to welcome two to three new women*, whose transportation costs are covered through ticket reimbursement.

Recognizing the unique struggles of women* in the Lagers, we offer an *Ehrenamtszuschale* (volunteer honorarium) to acknowledge their time and effort. To support mothers who wish to participate, we also arrange for childcare services, engaging an extra woman* for assistance, who is likewise compensated.

The Ubuntu Soup Kitchen thrives through partnerships with collectives, initiatives,

and individuals who share our vision. Each time, we collaborate with a different group to ensure diversity and inclusion in project implementation. These partners include migrants, refugees, undocumented individuals, activist groups and members of Berlin's civil society, all contributing to menu planning, cooking, and food distribution.

Before each cooking session, we organize a "Get to Know Each Other" meeting, providing women* from the Lagers an opportunity to connect with other support networks. These gatherings foster mutual support, raise awareness about available solidarity services, and strengthen grassroots mobilization and self-organization.

Groß Körös Retreats: Rest + Re-Connection

The retreats organized by BIG provide a much-needed space for refugee women* to step away from the isolation of the Lagers, reconnect with themselves, and strengthen community bonds. Held in Groß Körös, just outside of Berlin, these weekends offer a mix of relaxation, peer exchange, and collective empowerment. Self-care and wellness are essential for cultivating belonging for women* in the asylum system. By gathering in a safe and welcoming space, participants can share their struggles, find support, and build resilience. The retreats foster mental and physical well-being through recreational activities, cultural exchange, and peer-to-peer learning. Each retreat brings together women* from various Lagers and backgrounds, creating a multicultural space for solidarity.

Over the course of the weekend, participants engage in activities like cultural celebrations, sports, outdoor recreation, shared meals, and workshops on motherhood and the asylum system. The retreats take place at a Datscha community. One Datscha was donated to IW*S from an independent self-organized group, Edithless. During our events, we also have access to an additional Datscha and a communal kitchen. The facility is stocked with essential kitchen and sleeping supplies to accommodate all participants.

Preparation involves the core team arriving early to clean, set up sleeping arrangements, and create spaces for children. Transportation is arranged, including ticket refunds and pick-ups from Groß Körös train station. Collective cooking is a key aspect of the weekends as participants shop for fresh ingredients and prepare meals together. The retreat schedule balances structured sessions with flexible time for leisure and bonding, placing a strong emphasis on inclusivity and different women* taking the lead in organizing sessions.

A community effort: The retreats are not just for refugee women* but also involve allies and supporters from IW*S and other solidarity networks. Volunteers assist with activities such as boat rides, sports, and childcare, ensuring a welcoming and inclusive experience for all participants. At the end of the weekend, everyone helps clean the space before heading back to their accommodations. The core team stays behind to finalize the cleanup and transport materials back to Berlin.

More than just a weekend: Most importantly, these retreats allow women* to connect, share experiences, and build a network of support that extends beyond the weekend. These retreats are transformative – offering moments of joy, relaxation, and deep connection. They are a space where women* can reclaim their agency, share their stories, and find collective strength to navigate the asylum system.

Poetry Slam: Collective Act of Resistance

'Resilient Voices' is a queer working group within International Women* Space, which grew out of the Break Isolation work as we recognized the need to address the unique struggles of queer refugees. With a focus on intersectionality, Resilient Voices aims to create spaces for political empowerment and self-organized education. Central to



EXAMPLE WEEKLY SCHEDULE

	MORNING	AFTERNOON
MON	German lessons	- Open office hours - People interested in joining the group or collaborating are invited to introduce themselves / discuss opportunities
TUE	Peer-to-peer drop-in sessions for women seeking asylum	- Campaign meetings (ie "No to Bezahlkarte" campaign) - Planning meetings for large demos
WED	- Communication group - meets with other working groups - Meetings about application and report writing	Plenary session for all Members
THU	Admin crew is in the house	Admin crew is in the house
FRI		External groups can book to use the space
SAT		Refugee women* only Break Isolation Group community events
SUN		

this are the poetry slam events, where the power of storytelling fosters resilience and creativity, and the themes of gender, sexuality, colonial history, love, and rejection are shared through raw, unfiltered voices.

The Resilient Voices poetry slams are not just performances; they are a collective act of resistance, a step towards reclaiming agency, and an opportunity to transform

trauma into art. They reflect our commitment to creating a world where queer BIPOC migrants and refugees feel seen, heard, and supported. These events not only provide a platform for diverse narratives but also create a sense of belonging and healing for those often excluded from mainstream queer spaces. The sessions are spaces where shared experiences, whether as first-time speakers or seasoned storytellers, create deep connections within the community.

Organizing the poetry slams involves collaboration with partners like OYA Kollektiv, a queerfeminist collective and bar situated in the center of Kreuzberg. OYA is a community-driven place that aims to create a safer and 'home-like' space for those who seek it. OYA opens its doors to all FLINTA* and LGBTIQ+ communities, especially BIPOC people. Event coordination includes regular meetings, social media mobilization, and engaging artists, migrants, and asylum seekers to create an empowering program. Open mic sessions encourage freedom of expression, with documentation compiled for later publication. On the night of the event, moderators adapt to the audience's mood and sensitive topics, ensuring a respectful and supportive atmosphere. Funding covers space and facilitator fees, but as organizers, we also navigate the complexities of financial management and the invisible labour behind these events.

Working Groups

At IW*S, we organize and coordinate our work through a dynamic structure of different working groups, empowering each other to make decisions and work autonomously outside of plenary sessions. This developed organically within IW*S, with working groups initially focused on specific projects and later expanding to include groups centered on particular topics or areas of work. The Break Isolation Group is an example of the latter.

Each group meets independently on different days but maintains a crucial connection by sharing updates during plenary sessions. This balance of autonomy and collaboration allows working groups to focus on their respective areas while fostering a cohesive and united organizational effort. This structure not only enhances efficiency but also ensures that every voice contributes to the broader mission of IW*S.

International Women* Space

IW*S is a refugee and migrant-led, feminist, anti-racist self-organized group, based in

Berlin, Germany. We are a political community of women* — refugee women*, migrant women* and women* without the experiences. Our feminisms are intersectional and internationalist; we stand for resistance, representation, empowerment and solidarity. Through activism, community organizing, documentation and advocacy, we work to challenge and dismantle systemic barriers that perpetuate the discrimination and marginalization of refugee and migrant women*.

Rooted in the refugee movement and Berlin's history of social activism, IW*S has provided platforms for women* to connect, share experiences, and drive political and social change. A key aspect of our work is documentation and representation, amplifying the voices of marginalized women* and ensuring their presence in policy and decision-making spaces at national and European levels. We foster self-empowerment and encourage women* to reclaim agency and challenge systems of oppression.

Visit our website: iwspace.de or Instagram [@iwspace.de](https://www.instagram.com/iwspace.de) to discover more about our work.

Some of our Documentation Work

We have two self-published books with testimonials of refugee women* in Germany:

- WE EXIST, WE ARE HERE¹
- IN OUR OWN WORDS²

LAGER REPORTS: Audio message reports, recorded by women living in different shared accommodation facilities for refugees in Berlin and Brandenburg, were initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic when women* were quarantined in the lagers, and we couldn't continue with the visits. The reports document the daily lived experiences of the women* living in these facilities and address current situations and emerging issues. Topics discussed include general living conditions, access to basic essentials and services, racism, deportations, the COVID-19 pandemic, and many other issues.³



“They Are Here”

**Active Gatherings
Sending a Clear
Message of Solidarity**

Sigita Grintal

Društvo Odnos
Ljubljana

After the Second World War, Slovenia became one of the six Yugoslav republics. Slovenia started receiving migrants from other ex-Yugoslavian territories after 1991, the year of the disintegration of Yugoslavia and Slovenia's independence. In 2004 Slovenia joined the EU and more third-country citizens (TCNs) began settling in the country¹. Since 2015, the increasing number of asylum seekers is a common topic in the daily discourse of Slovenians, a challenge for the non-governmental sector and a significant factor in the government's complex migration policy.

Political Freedom & Demands on Promised Changes

Formed in January 2022 and led by Mr. Robert Golob, the Freedom Movement (SVOBODA) became the largest force in the National Assembly of Slovenia. The coalition of the new government, comprising of SVOBODA, the Social Democrats (SD) and the Left (LEVICA) hold 53 seats, so 14 seats more than under the previous government, the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) led by Prime Minister Janez Janša². Janša's political background reaches back to the country's struggle for independence from former Yugoslavia. Having served three times as prime minister, he is seen by many as a leader of the anti-immigration conservatives and is now an active critical opponent of the Freedom Movement³.

For those who were critical of Janša's government, the emergence of the new political party SVOBODA has raised hopes about the future of democracy, freedom and the betterment of the socio-economic situation in Slovenia. As promised by the new government, marginalized groups of society, including migrants, will be supported, and the cooperation with the non-governmental sector will be improved. The leading party agrees in many points with the Left, including plans to build new asylum centers, improving the integration of migrants into the labor market, easier bureaucratic procedures, and creation of more flexible housing schemes. At the same time, inflation, issues in the healthcare system and the lack of rental housing allows the opposition to criticize the new government's social-liberal ideas and to frame migrants as a danger to a small country.

Global crises present an additional weight to the challenge of taking care of local marginalized and disadvantaged communities. The failure to fulfill promises made by the new government before the elections already raised a wave of disappointment during their first year in power. The migrant communities, which have already been active since the "repressive" times under the previous government, are now showing even higher levels of protests. Activists and NGOs organize various kinds

1. See Link Reference 1 in Linktree (p.157)

2. See Link Reference 2 in Linktree (p.157)

3. See Link Reference 3 in Linktree (p.157)

of gatherings to make sure that human rights are acknowledged by decision-makers and by broader society. Media helps to maintain the public attention and plays a crucial role in delivering information. The increasing amount of TV coverage, reports in newspapers with pictures, and interviews showcasing positive stories of migrants, are good strategies for effective dialogue. Labor shortages across all branches of employment are also an important factor in recognizing the need to accept migrants as part of a democratic country. The newcomers, while not always wanted in Slovenia by locals, are now divided into legal and illegal migrants, and the tolerance for legally employed, and “well-behaved, well-integrated migrants” is increasing within society.

The case studies discussed below — of protest, a press conference and a public assembly — show how solidarity with migrants is achieved through public gatherings. The most sensitive topics are deportations of refugees arranged under the Dublin regulations, extended border controls, discrimination, housing problems, integration politics and poor living conditions in reception centers. These examples provide a clear message to the opposition and decision-makers, and propose engaging in dialogue to solve these specific issues. The invitation letters and posters for these events, which expressed the voices of organizers and migrants, were important tools for attracting the media’s attention.

Dublin Returns to Croatia & Extended Controls

Today, Slovenia and Croatia are both EU members and part of the Schengen zone. But on October 21, 2023, Slovenia, along with several of its neighboring countries, announced that it would temporarily add more border controls with Croatia because of a growing number of migrants arriving and a perceived heightened level of threat⁴.

Slovenian authorities are also actively using the Dublin Regulation, a legal agreement for returning asylum seekers to Croatia. The Ministry of Interior stresses that each case is treated individually, considering all the circumstances⁵.

Decisions to prevent returns can be made not only based on the law, but also by respecting human rights and acknowledging the best interest of individuals. Many activists criticize the government for not paying enough attention to the issue of deportation and for not keeping promises to handle every case individually — especially of those who experienced violence in Croatia and had successfully created new life in Slovenia. Most of these people have been in Slovenia for a long time and are well integrated into the local society. The decision to allow asylum seekers to stay where they want

4. See Link Reference 4 in Linktree (p.157)

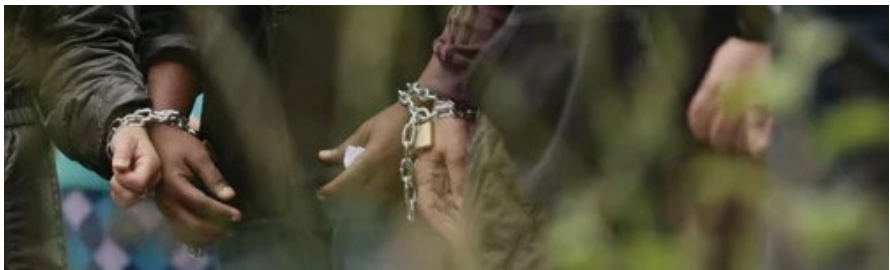
5. See Link Reference 5 in Linktree (p.157)



to be is a complex topic and should be discussed separately, but the individual cases represented through the protests help to illustrate the complexity of the issue.

Protest In Front of the Asylum Centre in Ljubljana with more than 70 Protesters & Media Representatives

“In May 2023, members of the asylum seekers’ initiative and support organizations called on the government to prevent the return of two asylum seekers to Croatia. They moved outside the asylum center to the government building, where they demanded a meeting with the Prime Minister or the Minister of Interior. In support of the foreigners,



one of the Left party leaders chained herself to one of the asylum seekers who will be deported to Croatia. She stressed that freedom is one and indivisible and must apply to all, but especially to the most vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers”⁶.

Inviting a representative of one of the leading political parties to participate in the protest is a good strategy to attract more attention from the media and the public. It is also a good way to show that achieving the goal is possible (as the individual members of government are not united on some questions), and that protest could lead to new forms of dialogue. Also, local people who voted for the party can express

6. See Link Reference 6 in Linktree (p.157)

image top: Protest in Ljubljana: <https://w2eu.info/en/countries/slovenia/sloveniapushbacks>

image bottom: Protest in Ljubljana: <https://www.delo.si/novice/slovenija/zahtevajo-da-vlada-prepeci-vrnitev-v-drzavo-ki-zanje-ni-varna>

TUHAJ SMO!



Protest Against Discrimination, Deportations & Breaking Up Of Families

28. March 2023, Ambasada Rog — a self-organized initiative in Ljubljana, made up of local activists and migrants — invited people to show solidarity with migrants with the words: “TUKAJ SMO! – WE ARE HERE”

“The Slovenian government has shocked us with two cruel decisions. First, it has denied protection to refugees who found safety in Slovenia after being literally chased



out of Croatia by violent police officers and is returning them back. Second, they surprised us by deciding not to amend the part of the Janša Foreigners Act (which requires an adult family member, in order to extend his or her temporary residence permit for the purpose of family reunification, to have at least a survival level of Slovenian language proficiency), which will see many family members of foreign workers lose their residence permits.

We have warned the government about all this. They have not been interested in the inhumane living conditions in the reception centers, nor in the cases of exploitation in the workplaces. As if they did not exist. We call on all residents, representatives of organizations, media and civil society to join us in solidarity [...]”⁷.

The invitation letter and one of many posters at the event (Figure 4) showcase how migrants, activists and the media raise awareness of issues and loudly demonstrate demands for the government. Written in both Slovenian and English, posters send a stronger message to local people, who will watch the news or read in the newspaper that “they are really here” and do not want to leave the country.

Protest/Press Conference Against The Deportation Of Migrants To Croatia – 26.09.2024 Ljubljana:

“At a press conference, the NGO Ambasada Rog pointed out that in the last year, many deportations have been taking place of migrants who have been living in Slovenia for a long time, have jobs, are learning the Slovenian language and are starting families. Although Slovenia is facing a labor shortage and is forced to import labor from abroad, we are witnessing cases where applicants for international protection, who are useful workers, are deported overnight by the Ministry.”

Ambasada Rog provides the case of a Nigerian, who arrived in Ljubljana as a migrant in June last year. “He has been working in Slovenia for over a year in a fast-food company, where he was recently promoted to foreman. He has made a circle of friends, is learning Slovenian and last year worked as a volunteer for the flood relief.”

Ambasada Rog pointed out that the case of the Nigerian citizen is far from an isolated case. “A worker who has a pregnant Slovenian partner in Slovenia was taken away by the police in front of her eyes. Another worker was hospitalized in a psychiatric clinic due to severe mental distress, but the Ministry still wanted to deport him despite his severe traumatization and repeated suicide attempts. [...] Instead of implementing the

7. See Link Reference 7 in Linktree (p.157)

commitments set out in the integration strategy of the Slovenian government, we are witnessing an incredible bureaucratic cruelty”, Ambasad Rog’s representatives add.

The applicants for international protection themselves also spoke about their fears of deportation and their successful integration in Slovenia during the press conference. The press conference presented an attempt to get public attention and to send their message across to the government authorities.

“This Is Slovenia! Get Out!” Voices Of Discrimination

The press conference, organized by Ambasad Rog, brought together those asylum seekers who have been in Slovenia for a long time and who fear deportation. “The press conference was protected by two police officers and interrupted by a security guard from the Maxi market, who said ‘This is Slovenia! Get out!’; he was overheard by the conference participants, who only observed the two police officers from a distance”⁸.

Housing For All

Another important issue for migrants in Slovenia is housing. In the last few years, Slovenian people, and especially migrants, have been facing challenges in accessing affordable quality housing. Barriers such as discrimination, low housing availability, high rental costs, and poor living conditions reduce the quality of life and lead to further marginalization. Communities supporting migrants are actively trying to create a dialogue with the government. They ask for some practical improvements, such as making special agreements with the owners to renovate apartments or build additional ones for migrants, or using old vacant houses and hotels. The government agrees with the need to increase the capacities and, although the task of ensuring it will be difficult, there is always hope for change.

In December 2024, the Slovenian government announced that the new property tax



8. See Link Reference 8 in Linktree (p.157)

image: Invitation to assembly: <https://push-forward.org/novica/summary-adequate-housing-and-migrants-slovenia>

reform would be implemented, and that the owners of any second home or additional developable land will need to pay taxes. “The government sees this as a crucial step towards improving the situation on the housing market, such as increasing the supply of real estate, reducing rent and supplying long-term registered rentals, rather than holding on to empty properties as an investment, or renting them on the black market”. This would bring hope especially to young people and marginalized groups, who don’t have access to affordable housing⁹.

Public Assembly: Housing For All – Housing Challenges Of Migrants

Invitation Letter:

“We kindly invite you to the assembly ‘Housing for All’, which will take place on Wednesday, December 4, 2024, in Ljubljana.

Migrant workers, who make up 16% of the workforce of approximately one million actively employed individuals, play a significant role in supporting and advancing societal progress. Despite this, migrants often face significantly unequal housing opportunities, such as living in overcrowded and inadequate housing, paying excessively high rent and costs that exceed their financial capacity, discrimination based on origin, skin color, or other circumstances, barriers to finding housing due to language difficulties, low income and financial insecurity. The struggles of many migrants are invisible, but very real.

This assembly is an opportunity to open a space for dialogue and find solutions. We have invited representatives from the Ministry of Solidarity-Based Future and the Municipality of Ljubljana to join us in finding solutions for a fairer housing policy. The assembly is organized by *Kulturno Društvo Gmajna* (Gmajna Cultural Society) and *Infokolpa* (Info Box), both actively engaged in the *Stanovanjski Blok* initiative.”

Agenda of the Assembly:

Presentations and Discussion: Speakers will present existing efforts to improve the situation, the challenges faced by migrants, and share personal stories.

Finding Solutions: Together, we will develop concrete proposals for improving housing policy and discuss actions that could encourage decision-makers to implement urgent changes.

9. See Link Reference 9 in Linktree (p.157)

10. See Link Reference 10 in Linktree (p.157)

Housing is not a privilege, but a right! We must not tolerate discrimination and unaffordable rents. We demand accessible and fair housing for everyone!”¹⁰

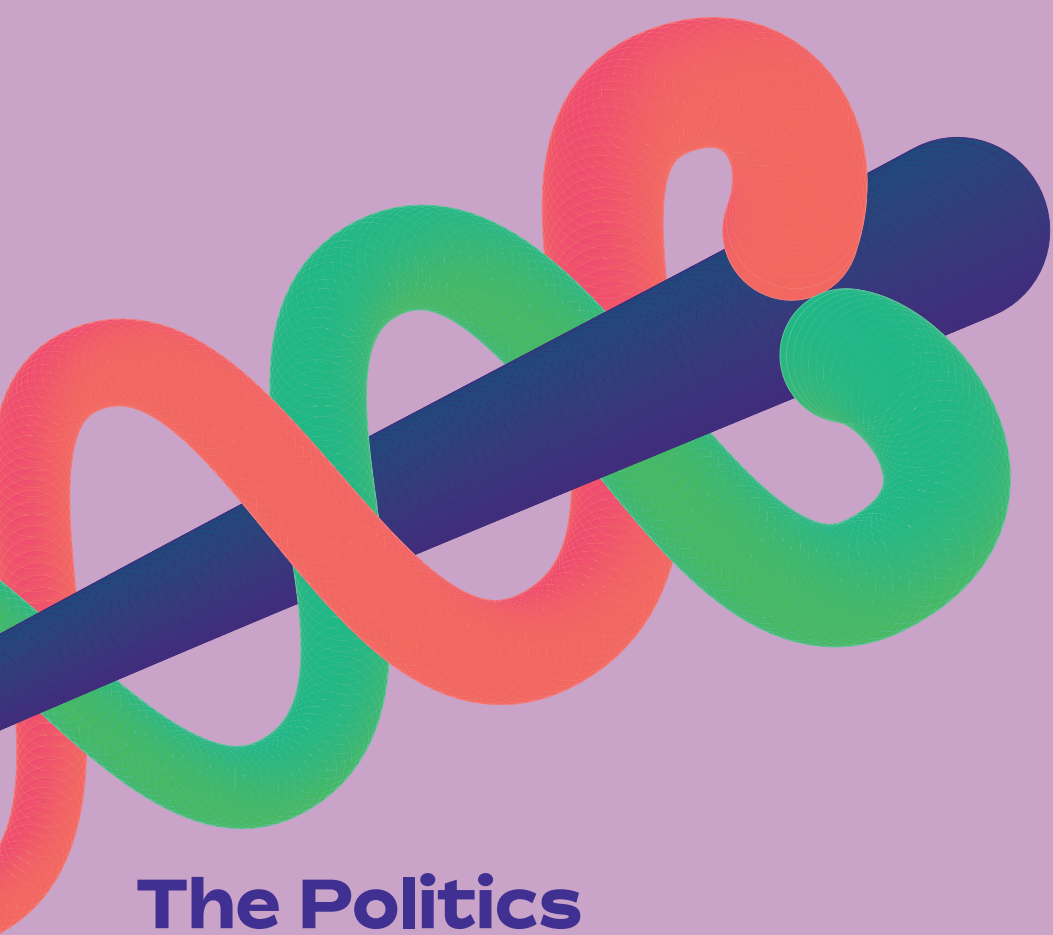
The planned new tax reform and the invitation letter for the assembly show how urgent the housing situation is and how migrants, as one of the most marginalized groups in the country, need our support and solidarity. If their situation is not represented and their basic needs are not recognized, we cannot speak of a democratic society or about freedom as the founding principle for political power and human dignity.

Conclusion

Protests and other public gatherings often do not have any significant impact by themselves, but in the context of intense social and political changes they can serve as an effective tool for expressing dissent and broadening the public discourse. They can lead to meaningful change, or at the very least help to express the voices of marginalized groups and show solidarity by addressing specific issues.

The case studies from Slovenia demonstrate how the intersections between migrant rights, housing, and socio-economical struggles arise during times of political transitions within the small country, and how diverse forms of protest activities organized by migrant communities are effective in advocacy. When the new government does not fulfill the expectations of people who elected it and does not keep its promises, activists will demand dialogue. Also, the wider society is paying more attention and attributing increasing importance to migrant-related issues, which influence political decisions. The media plays a key role in transmitting the protesters' message, which could accelerate changes or at least introduce some positive voices into the public sphere.

While the cases discussed may not involve large numbers of refugees, and the protests might not immediately transform the system or political landscape, they highlight individual or small group efforts that showcase powerful solidarity, trust in humanity, and the pursuit of basic human rights. If these actions can influence broader public opinion and potentially shift the decisions of policymakers, they become a meaningful form of political participation and an effective strategy for fostering dialogue and driving change.



The Politics of Healthcare From Below

**The Experiences of
the Self-Managed Clinic
Ambulatorio Popolare Borgo Vecchio**

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Gabriella Palermo

Ambulatorio Popolare Borgo Vecchio & Centro Sociale Anomalia & ECSEuro Research Team
Palermo

Introduction

With this paper we wish to explore healthcare from a grassroots perspective, specifically within self-managed spaces. We will focus on the *Ambulatorio Popolare Borgo Vecchio*, a community-run clinic in a working-class neighborhood in Palermo, Italy. Our goal is two-fold: first, to share how this clinic operates, with volunteer doctors (such as cardiologists, gynecologists, and neurologists) and local activists running the space; and second, to explore what the clinic isn't and how it could evolve. We will start by looking at the ideas of care, health, and well-being within the context of the decline of public healthcare in Italy and Europe. We will then dive into the history and experience of the clinic, focusing on its very day-to-day practices. We will then discuss how transfeminist theories and practices from the *Non Una Di Meno* ("Not One Less") movement were incorporated into the clinic, in form of a gynecological helpdesk. Altogether, these collective experiences contribute to a vision of healthcare and reproductive rights focused on well-being and relationships. The aim is to tell our story to share and create tools that can help us and others to build wider alliances. This contribution includes the visual narratives by transfeminist artist @arraggiata, who is part of these movements, offering a rich, multi-voiced view of this political project.

Healthcare Rights & Welfare Erosion

Access to healthcare rights in Southern European countries has taken a huge hit in recent decades, as part of an ongoing wave of cuts to public spending on social welfare. The 2007-2008 financial crisis, the austerity measures that followed, and the 2019-2020 COVID pandemic accelerated this decline, pushing healthcare access further out of reach for many. This shift towards a privatization model deepens existing health inequalities, making it harder for certain social groups to access essential care and protect their well-being. In particular, the recent crises showed how the poorer strata of the population, as well as people with migration background, women, and LGBTIQ+ people have a hard time accessing care.

This shift towards privatizing healthcare is just the visible part of a much deeper, more worrying change in how we think about the "right to health." Privatization has shifted resources from public to private healthcare, creating a true "health market." This has been possible because key concepts have been redefined, influenced by neoliberal ideas of medicine: healthcare has become a commodity, public services are being run like businesses, care has turned into a service, and the body has been "medicalized," especially with the growing focus on pharmaceuticals.

As a result, the idea of “care” has shifted towards a much more “mechanical” approach. Doctors no longer focus on promoting the overall well-being of individuals; their role has become more about “repairing” broken or malfunctioning parts of the body. Professionals no longer dig into the causes of illnesses, but instead focus on treating the symptoms with services that are measured, coded, and priced, all with the aim of prescribing the right drug to fix the problem.

This approach completely ignores the very idea of “care” and is incompatible with more holistic medical cultures in which the person is always connected to the surrounding environment, as well as to the material, social, cultural, and economic conditions of life.

These harmful trends in local and national healthcare have pushed us to the point where we urgently need to create and embrace a new model of medicine — one that is social, universal, and grounded within the community. In this model, people actively take care of their own well-being as active participants (we’re subjects, not objects). Healthcare has to be this way, or it’s not healthcare at all!

The People’s Clinic of Borgo Vecchio

In late 2015, a group of activists from the *Anomalia* social center set up the People’s Clinic, a free clinic offering specialist consultations in Palermo. The Clinic, like the social center, is based in Borgo Vecchio, a working-class area within the city. The *Anomalia* social center is located on the ground floor of a large public housing block where around 100 families live. The center’s connections with these families, along with support from the local football team, helped create its initial network, deeply rooting it within the neighborhood. This sense of connection is really important when it comes to the People’s Clinic: building trust and understanding the neighborhood is key to bringing back the idea of healthcare as a right and focusing on health as part of overall well-being. In its early years, the People’s Clinic grew by combining the medical, organizational, and political know-how of activists and doctors who all shared a common belief in healthcare as a right and were part and parcel of the local grassroots political scene.

The clinic offers a variety of specialist services such as cardiology, neurology, gynecology, and ultrasounds, and it works hard to maintain long-term relationships with its patients. Its location within the community, along with accessible services and short waiting times, makes it easier for people to receive both preventive and

curative care.

The activists at the social center take on the role of a “social secretariat.” They handle requests, set up doctor appointments, look after the clinic spaces, and make sure everything stays clean and accessible for everyone. The doctors, on the other hand, do an initial screening for each patient and help them figure out the best treatment plan. Some people get treated at the clinic, while others are referred to other public healthcare facilities that are better equipped or have more resources.

One of the main goals is to convince people that healthcare is a basic right and to encourage them to take care of themselves regularly. Health education is a big part of the project, aimed at both adults and kids. It is done through seminars, lessons, and workshops held at the social center, as well as in public places or schools.

All these activities come together in a specific way: the Borgo Vecchio Clinic was set up to denounce the existing problems with public healthcare and the loss of the right to health. But instead of just talking about the issue, it’s doing something about it by creating and showing a real alternative to the current neoliberal ways of managing healthcare.

The Gynecological Counter: Dreams & Practices of Transfeminist Social Reproductive Justice

The pandemic really highlighted and exacerbated the severe flaws in the Italian healthcare system. But it also shed light on how gender and health are tied into neoliberal policies, especially when it comes to controlling bodies and creating hierarchies within the capitalist system that affect who gets access to services and rights. During the Covid-19 crisis, for example, in Palermo and elsewhere, the first hospital wards to be converted into Covid wards were in the fields of obstetrics and gynecology, showing just how little sexual and reproductive health was valued, making them seem totally expendable.

As a response to that, in 2020, right after the Italian state’s lockdown from March to May to fight the spread of Covid-19, a new project started to take shape at the clinic. The Palermo branch of the transfeminist movement Non Una Di Meno decided to team up with the Ambulatorio Popolare and open the gynecology desk. This decision wasn’t just about responding to the health crisis and the new intersectional inequalities it created — issues like class, gender, race, and ableism. It also came



from a collective question: what does it really mean to take care of someone? Who's doing the caring? Who gets left out of care? And, most importantly, how are care and healthcare connected?

As stated in the manifesto *Abbiamo Un Piano* (“we have a plan”) and in the various documents produced by the movement both locally and nationally¹, health does not only mean the absence of illness, but also signifies a broader perspective of well-being and the re-appropriation of individual and collective care practices, outside of the toxic production of gender-based violence. Being structural, gender-based violence does not only correspond to physical violence, but is rather inherent in all spheres, spaces, and times of our lives.

The relationship between gender and health, on the other hand, is produced by multiple forms of violence: suffice it to think that the discipline of gynecology owes its “scientific developments” to the experiments conducted by Marion Sims — “the father of gynecology” — on the bodies of women enslaved on American plantations

1. See Link Reference 1 in Linktree [p.157]

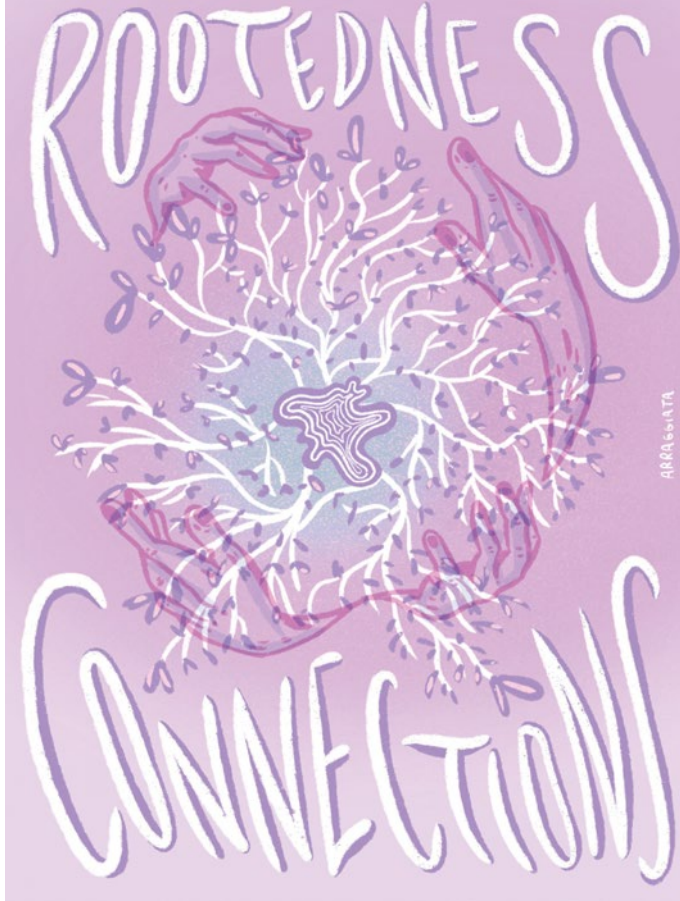
in the modern era. The female and black body has thus long been the abused object of knowledge, constructed through violent practices in a discipline that still relies on the speculum — an invasive and penetrative medical tool that embodies patriarchal medical knowledge — as its main instrument.

Interweaving these transfeminist desires, practices, alliances and knowledge, the gynecological help-desk has been entirely managed and organized by the movement through volunteer doctors who, every week, carry out free examinations, pap-tests, ultrasound scans, and colposcopes. The movement manages the promotion, dissemination, and communication of the clinic's visiting days, collecting contact information, arranging appointments, and offering initial support and contact to those who come to the clinic. Moreover, it also seeks to go beyond mutual aid, attempting to build a safe and caring space in which health and well-being are seen as broader paradigms that extend beyond mere access to healthcare service.

In fact, as part of the gynecological visiting days for women and LGBTQIA+ subjectivities, various dialogues and debates on transfeminist self-education are organized. These include public debates on sexually transmitted diseases such as HPV, during which information about the vaccines necessary for preventing disease transmission are disseminated. Moreover, in order to build an accessible space for all, debates on contraception and on transfeminist language within the medical field have also been organized. During visiting days, free HIV and syphilis tests are provided by *Protego*, an LGBTQIA+ allied help-desk and association.

After various initiatives and discussions, the mutual aid group for invisible diseases like vulvodynia and endometriosis was set up within the clinic to share information, contacts, and experiences. One of the helpdesk's key allies, Disability Pride, works on creating an idea of medicine that eliminates ableism and is fully accessible to all. They also focus on the idea that sexual and reproductive health should be available for everyone, without silencing, erasing, or infantilizing people with disability. The transfeminist help-desk has also been expanding its focus beyond the field of gynecology, running workshops on body self-exploration, setting up a psychological listening desk and group discussions to raise collective awareness.

These efforts are in line with the movement's larger goals, which are based on the needs and desires of all marginalized and oppressed groups. One of these goals is to challenge the current healthcare system, which is still built around the perspective of patriarchal capitalism — the cis-heterosexual white male who is able-bodied and owns



everything. By creating self-managed clinics, the aim is to create a world where care is provided through community-based, shared systems, instead of the individualistic models we're used to.

Transnational Alliances: What is the Idea of Healthcare from Below?

Healthcare is not a commodity, it's a common good. As one of the founding doctors of the Clinic recalls, citing Maccacaro, "Health is not just the absence of disease. Health is complete psycho-physical well-being. Social well-being is more than simply not being hypertensive. The problem here is that if I reduce my social, psychophysical well-being to the absence of disease, I reduce the disease to its diagnosis – and at that point, the diagnosis becomes a commodity."

The territorial proximity of the People's Health Clinic to the local community makes it much easier for people in the neighborhood to access healthcare, especially at a



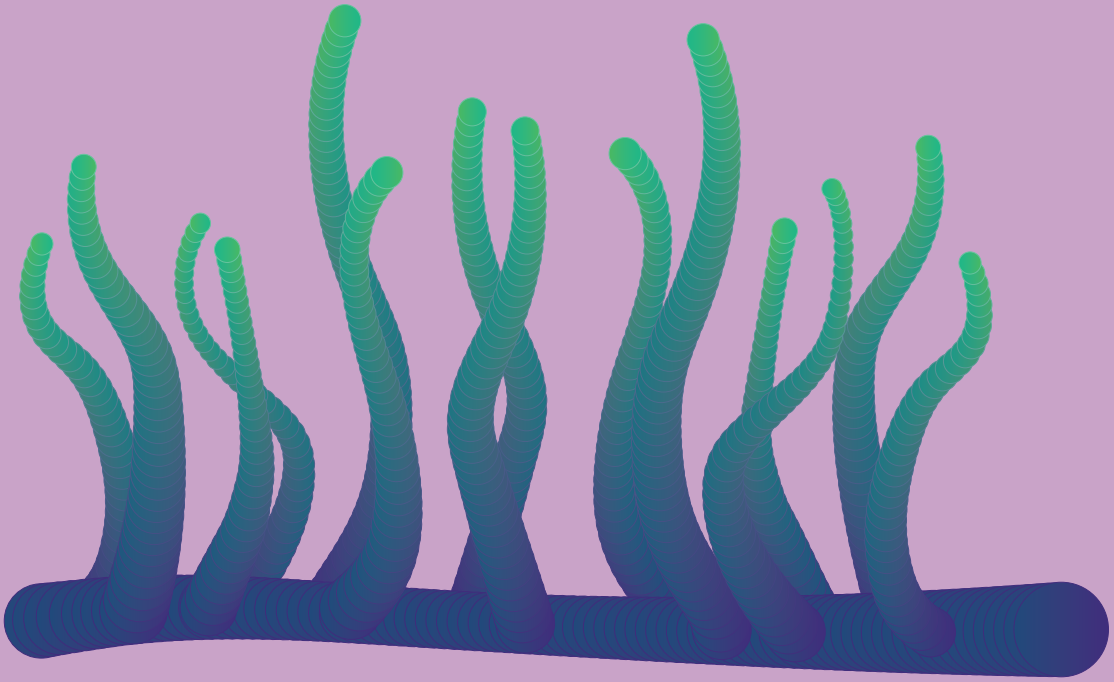
time when many healthcare facilities are getting more distant and harder to reach due to long waiting times. By making healthcare more accessible, the clinic promotes prevention and a broader understanding of well-being.

A longstanding relationship with the local community helps build trust, which counteracts the typical emergency-focused, defensive approach to medicine. Instead, it fosters a sense of well-being based on the belief that patients are active participants in their own care, not just passive recipients of prescriptions. In the clinic, the relationship between doctor and patient is as equal as possible.

Accessibility for women, LGBTQIA+ subjectivities, and people with disability is paramount: Healthcare and reproductive rights are not equally accessible to all. Certain groups face hyper-medicalization, while others are left abandoned. The Covid pandemic has once again highlighted how access to healthcare is often considered expendable for specific social groups, including women, LGBTQIA+ people, and people with disabilities. A transfeminist perspective on healthcare goes beyond

demanding equal access; it transforms the very concept of care. It critiques the history and harmful legacy of traditional gynecology as both racist and patriarchal, advocates for reproductive rights for women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and people with disabilities, raises awareness about sexually transmitted and invisible diseases, and, above all, centers the needs and desires of all marginalized bodies.

Healthcare from below means recognizing that healthcare is a deeply political issue. Over time, turning welfare into a depoliticized “service” has disconnected people from seeing healthcare as something that is tied to political and social realities — something that affects well-being, suffering, life, and death. As healthcare becomes more privatized and profit-driven, it ultimately favors certain social groups over others. The People’s Health Clinic works politically on multiple levels: changing what healthcare means, providing access to it for working-class and marginalized communities, and helping those communities develop a routine of well-being and healthcare.



A Decade of Grassroots Solidarity in Wilhelmsburg

Simon

Wilhelmsburg Solidarisch
Hamburg

In September 2024, we celebrated 10 years of Wilhelmsburg Solidarisch (WiSo). The celebration took place at the Infoladen Wilhelmsburg, a centrally located self-managed space in our neighborhood. We created an exhibition documenting our work over the last decade. So, what happened at the start, how did we manage to continue for so long — and what solutions do we find against the neoliberal Zeitgeist?

Collective Self-Help as a Starting Point

It all started in 2014 with the idea that we shouldn't have to face everyday problems alone and individually, but rather organize our neighborhood through collective action. One inspiration was the community organizing movement in Seattle, which was making waves at the time. This led to the concept of the Anlaufpunkt (support meeting), where we meet every two weeks to discuss our concerns together.

Trouble with the landlord? Problems with the authorities or health insurance? We try to find collective and supportive solutions. In doing so, we learn about the legal system and its loopholes through real-life cases, or organize joint visits to the job center — because together, we can achieve more in almost any situation. It is important to us that everyone is part of this day-to-day struggle. People who have been with us for a long time share their conflicts with the authorities just like those attending for the first time. We see the experience of not being left alone with bureaucratic problems as an “antidote” to the neoliberal spirit of the times.

Creating Practical Support Structures: Office Day

In addition to the Anlaufpunkt, we also have the Office Day. The idea here is that people can work on their paperwork together or ask questions if they don't understand a form. We also provide office supplies such as computers, envelopes, printers, and a fax machine. (No joke, in our daily work, faxing is still important because the transmission report serves as legal proof of delivery.)

On Office Day, we also frequently translate forms for people with little or no German proficiency.

A Non-Dogmatic, Evolving Approach

The principles of WiSo are grassroots democratic and non-dogmatic. This means that we always aim for people to contribute their ideas and be involved in decision-making, regardless of their political background. Over the years, we have introduced various

formats and meetings, some of which were later discontinued due to lack of interest.

The latter include the Anlaufpunkt against workplace injustice, which we organized with FAU (Freie Arbeiter*innen Union, an independent anarchist workers' union), and a meeting called "Survival of the Sickest," where we sought an emancipatory approach to chronic illnesses. If interest in these formats resurfaces in the future, they can be revived at any time.



Reflection & Political Mindfulness

To reflect on ourselves as a group and discuss fundamental strategic decisions, we hold a reflection meeting once a month. After some major internal conflicts, we realized that individual well-being needs to be a priority in our solidarity practice.

In other political groups, we often saw people burn out due to overcommitment and a lack of good mechanisms to counteract it. This often led to people quietly withdrawing from activism.

We want to counter this with a culture of political mindfulness. Stress (including personal stress) should be discussed within the group. If a project is too demanding or drains too many resources, it may be better to discontinue it rather than risk burnout among WiSo members. Reflection meetings also serve as an opportunity to align individual needs with group interests.

At the reflection meetings, responsibilities for various tasks are also assigned. Who opens the space? Who takes care of emails and social media?

Navigating Crises & Building Collective Knowledge

With these three pillars (Anlaufpunkt, Office Day, and Reflection Meeting), Wilhelmsburg Solidarisch has existed for a long time. The COVID-19 pandemic, like for many groups, was a particularly big challenge. Meetings could only be held clandestinely or via online calls. Even long after the pandemic, attendance at meetings did not return to previous levels.

Over time, we compiled collective knowledge through our methods, which allowed us to successfully resist the neoliberal system in many areas. On issues like Hartz IV (social benefits), health insurance, child benefits, and more, we have gained a great deal of legal expertise and solidarity that helps individuals in concrete situations. It makes a huge difference whether you go to an office alone or with five determined comrades.

Tackling the Housing Crisis: A Stubborn Challenge

However, one major issue that we have been unable to address effectively is the housing market in Hamburg. Prices continue to rise, and housing has become so scarce that many vulnerable groups, such as migrants and single parents, struggle

to find suitable accommodation through regular channels.

That is why two WiSo members founded the Likedeelerei collective about three and a half years ago — to set an example that solidarity-based housing allocation is possible (for more information on Likedeelerei, see p. 81).

Strengthening Networks & Political Action

A major stroke of luck for us was attending a summer school for solidarity groups in 2023, where we connected with Berg-Fidel and Gröpelingen Solidarisch. This exchange provided us with crucial input and ideas for re-evaluating and expanding our concept, as we also discussed and adopted practices from other groups.

Our future goal is to integrate newcomers more quickly, recording their interests and phone numbers to better mobilize for actions via calls and SMS. We also introduced a Telegram channel for updates on upcoming events and protests. A new meeting format, the “Action Group Meeting,” was established to turn conflicts presented in the Anlaufpunkt and Office Day meetings into form of political actions such as demonstrations, rallies, or direct actions. This way, we can involve people who prefer activist approaches.

Rebuilding Outreach & Local Alliances

Additionally, we improved our public outreach and actively started recruiting new members again — something that had largely stalled after the pandemic. One key realization was that a solidarity network should not only provide everyday assistance, but also needs to integrate more people.

Therefore, we are now in active exchange with various neighborhood groups that have been politically active for a long time. While informal connections existed before, many groups operated independently. Our current goal is to facilitate referrals between individuals and foster a broader understanding of a social network.

For example, we filled a scheduling gap for the community kitchen that now offers a shared meal every Thursday. We also intensified collaborations with Women in Action and the Open Antifascist Meeting.

Expanding Impact Through National Networks

Furthermore, after the summer school, we joined the OSB (Organized Social Movement), a network of many solidarity groups across Germany working to build counterpower. This network provides material for strategic discussions and practical training, such as how to properly read an official notice or improve social media use.

The exchange helps us continuously reflect on and improve our work, and it is encouraging to know that similar struggles are taking place elsewhere.

Looking Ahead: Language Justice & Political Education

This is a retrospective on the past 10 years of Wilhelmsburg Solidarisch. During this time, the group has built extensive collective knowledge to navigate the neoliberal everyday reality in a solidarity-based way and to establish counterpower wherever possible. Often, agency in self-defense comes from knowing legal options and loopholes. But more importantly, it comes from knowing that we are not alone and that we can collectively fight against injustice. Our motto has become “Touch one, Touch all!” — which sums it up well.

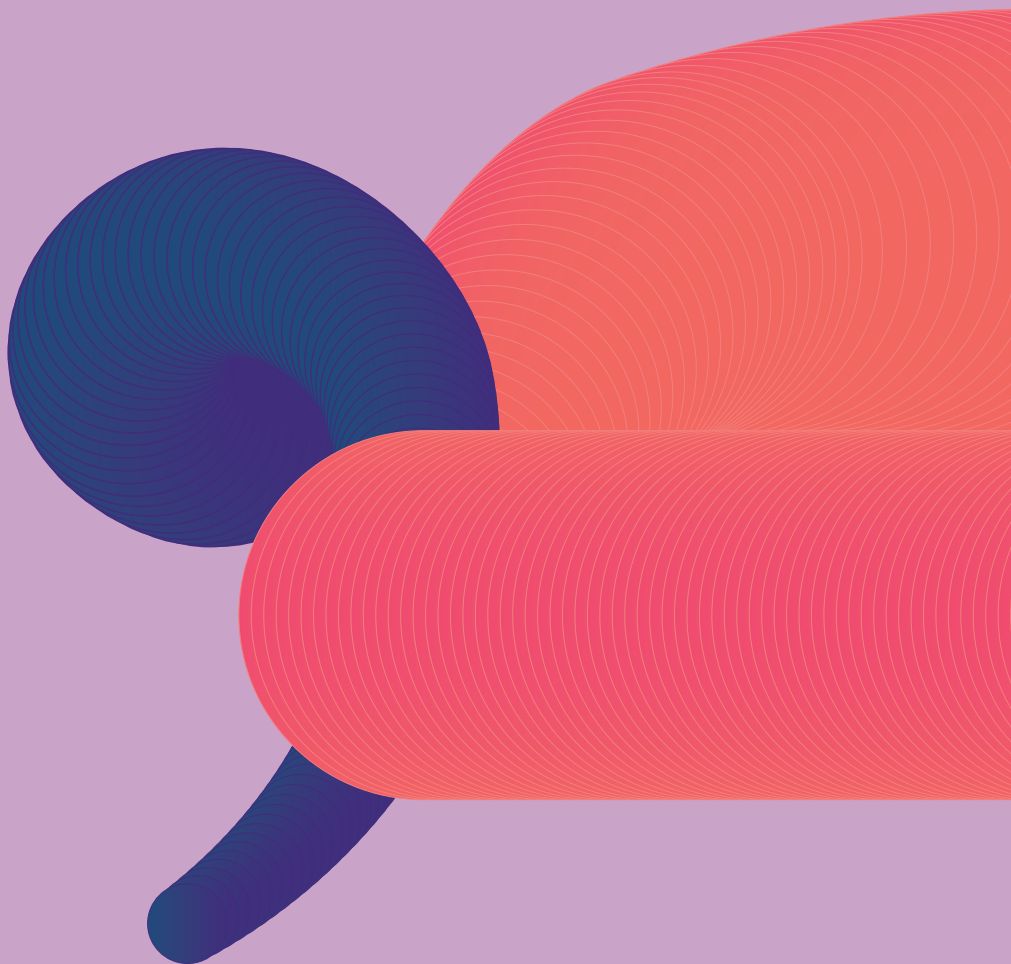
So, what does the future of WiSo look like? We hope to exist for at least another 10 years, growing sustainably and adopting more effective methods to combat rising fascism and an increasingly anti-social state.



We Have Set Two Specific Goals for This Year:

Our first goal is “Language Justice” — ensuring continuous, high-quality live translation during all Wilhelmsburg Solidarisch meetings. Groups like Gröpelingen Solidarisch have found that in this way, people with limited or no German skills can participate better and become empowered to make their voices heard. WiSo is currently majority white and academic, and a stronger focus on language justice could help align our representation with the actual demographics of Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg, a highly migrant-influenced district. We aim to build a larger pool of translators and interpreters and acquire the necessary technology for simultaneous translation.

The second goal is political education. In the past, we organized debate evenings where we discussed various texts together. We want to revive this tradition this year.



Living Room

**Somewhere
In Between a Safe
& Brave Space**

Claske Dijkema

Living Room Collective
Bern

***Safe space is a space of uncertainty and change,
reactively and proactively responding to
and interacting with an insecure world***

(The Roestone Collective, 2014: 1362)

Living Room is an independent community center in the quickly gentrifying neighborhood of Breitenrain in Bern. It is run by a loose collective of about ten people, who come from different places around the world and who chose or were forced to make Bern their home. It is a place to create, a place that offers space for art, community and resistance, a place that can be appropriated and that can be made home. Various collectives meet here for regular meetings and public events, exhibitions and film evenings take place and artists use the space as a studio. There are many stories to tell about Living Room, and others have done so, reflecting on a postcolonial living room (Jain, 2021) and how Living Room is a case of insurgent place-making (Rogers-Bursen, 2021). This article focuses on Living Room as a space of encounter — somewhere in between a safe and brave space —, and looks at the role of art in making this encounter possible.

Starting with the argument that claiming space is also a spatial process, and that closer scrutiny of the places where this is possible is worthwhile, the author then develops the argument that Living Room is somewhere between a safe and a brave space and argues why this position matters. Finally, it ends with an inquiry into the role art plays in making encounters between members of marginalized groups and members of the established group in society not only possible, but also constructive — though confrontational.

To understand the author's perspective on Living Room, it is helpful to know that she is a white woman who is a relative newcomer in Bern, who can make herself understandable in the local language but still struggles to master it, but who is at home in academic language. What drew her to Living Room is her desire to be part of the 'Tower of Babel' that Living Room represents to her. Although Claske Dijkema wrote this text, the authorship is multiple, drawing on conversations, on the many documents written by and for Living Room as a self-representation for the public and potential donors, as well as on texts written by other members of the collective.

Claiming Place Takes Place Somewhere

In a context in which People of Color are treated as eternal visitors in the countries

they live in — while they are considered to “really” belong elsewhere — claiming a place and calling it “home” is a political act (Dijkema 2021). This reminder of eternal foreignness takes place for example through being confronted with the ever-returning question: “where are you from?”, and when an answer “from here!” is countered with “No, where are you really from?”. One of the founders of Living Room, Mohamed Wa Baile, describes how he feels as a black man in the Breitenrain neighborhood:

“Here [in Breitenrain] it's too white and also expensive. It's mostly middle-class people who are here. [...] If I'm conscious then I see me also walking in the street, as a lone person, because I don't represent what Breitenrain is because the norm is white. And me, I feel like a stranger even if I've been here since 2000” (quoted in Rogers-Bursen, 2021, 34)

This feeling of being made to feel out of place in a city that is supposed to be home is shared by Ernesto Pedro, a Black hairdresser located not far from Living Room: “Sometimes I feel not welcome even if it's my home, because I'm Black and they think I'm not from here. And then they want to talk about integration” (quoted in Rogers-Bursen, 2021, 40). In this context, opening a place that one can call “home” is a political act.

Living Room opened its doors in summer 2021 as an initiative of the Berner Rassismus Stammtisch collective. Berner Rassismus Stammtisch aims to make the anti-racist knowledge of People of Color (PoC) and people with a migration history publicly visible. Berner Rassismus Stammtisch criticizes that experiences, arguments, and emotions of People of Color and people with a migration history are often neutralized in conventional debates. Living Room is about opening a space in which PoC and people with a migration history can express themselves freely and have the power to define their own experiences (berner-rassismusstammtisch.ch, n.d.). For example, Living Room visitor Dania Murad remarks about her experience in the community space: “I feel it's a safe space for me. And... a space of opportunities [...] It's not like every other space that the state or the church in Bern controls, where you have to apply [in order to use it]....” (quoted in Rogers-Bursen, 2021, 1962). Living Room makes room for discourse and ideas.

Claiming a place is not only a question of discourse. It is also a material and spatial question: it takes place somewhere. On a micro-scale, this may mean insisting on getting a seat in the bus, like Rosa Parks did in the 1950s. On a more macro-scale, this can mean the ongoing struggle in many places across the world — including

Switzerland — for the removal of objects that glorify colonialism and racist ideas, such as statues, busts and street names. Living Room’s claim to space in such a central location as Breitenrain — on the ground floor of a main shopping street, with large windows and an open door that invites people in — fits somewhere in the middle between the micro and macro level.

Where Is That Location Between Safe & Brave Space

Living Room aims to be a safer space where People of Color and people with migration history can speak on their own terms, but also to make these voices heard to a wider audience (beyond the communities that make up Living Room), and to form and strengthen a critical counterpublic through cultural political interventions (berner-rassismusstammtisch.ch, n.d.). A counterpublic applies to subordinated social groups who engage in public discourse to challenge mainstream ideas within society (Fattal, 2018). Both physical and discursive spaces play an important role in forming counterpublics and in making room for counter-discourse. In the case of the U.S. women’s movement, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks, lecture series, academic programs, festivals, but also local meeting places have played an important role in formulating feminist ideas and making them known (Fraser 1990). In these parallel discursive arenas, “members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses”, which helps to challenge mainstream views and develop their own understanding of who they are, what they need, and what matters to them (Fraser, 1990: 67). As a local meeting space that offers room for anti-racist thinking and being, as well as for diaspora knowledge, Living Room navigates the tension between being a safer and a braver space.

The Concept of “Safe Space”

The term originated in the Women’s Movement & the LGBTQI Community in the 1960s and 70s (Kenney 2001:24). Within feminist, queer, and civil rights movements, the term has come to represent an environment where marginalized groups are protected from violence and harassment. Beyond physical safety, such spaces foster freedom of expression, collective empowerment, and the development of strategies for resistance (Kenney 2001:24). However, according to Fraser (1990), safe spaces have a double function: their goal is not only to provide safety, but also to prepare a group for publicly defending their ideas, and hence for political participation. When this confrontation becomes possible, we no longer speak of a “safe space”, but of a

“brave space” — or what I would call an “agonistic space” (Dijkema 2022).

A brave space is a place where constructive conflict and encounter are possible. The concept of “brave space” builds on the idea of “safe space”, but encourages individuals to step into discomfort for deeper learning and dialogue in social justice and educational settings (Arao and Clemens 2013). It is like a platform where you can have these discussions openly, knowing it’s safe to share your thoughts and feelings.

The term agonistic space is a direct reference to “agonism”, a term theorized by the philosophers Mouffe and Laclau. It means being able to challenge and dissent in a productive way (Koutsouris et al., 2022). As a result, conflict should be understood as a natural part of social interaction and as conducive to social change. Agonism stands in opposition firstly to neoliberal forms of consensus that depoliticize issues by framing politics as technical problem-solving rather than ideological struggle; and secondly to antagonism, which is a form of opposition or hostility, whereby



conflict is adversarial and destructive. Agonism is close to the democratic ideal of the constructive confrontation between a plurality of interests, needs and visions. Spaces for agonistic debate are lacking in our neoliberal societies — in particular for People of Color and those with migration experience, — because disagreement is typically interpreted as aggression. Typical reactions are “if you are not happy you can go home”, which expresses a combination of racism and nationalism (Dijkema,

image: Claske Dijkema, Nataliia Hradanovych and Mohamed Wa Baile in front of Living Room for interview with Nina Humi (Journal B). Photo: David Frst, 28.02



2021). Dealing constructively with conflicts and tensions in society is also an important mission for community work.

Living Room is a meeting place for different groups. But, for which groups exactly? Who should be allowed to feel at home here, and who should get ready to feel uncomfortable? For true encounter, one should better be prepared for conflict. Mohamed Wa Baile remembers how a person once ran away from a movie because they found it problematic. The movie screening was then stopped, the person came back and there was a discussion. Art can play an important role in this type of encounter that transcends difference. Artistic expression can challenge rational positions because it is easier to reach one another when we are touched on an emotional level. The following section proposes a critical reflection on art as a means to make constructive confrontation possible, suggesting that it can be used more widely in community work.

image: Mohamed Wa Baile in front of the "Hevetzid" monument in Living Room, in front of the Living Archiv. Photo: David Fürst, 28.02.205

The Role of Art in Making Encounters Possible.

For the Living Room collective, art is a central component of resistance. Its Artist-in-Community program uses Community Arts and Social Arts to invent new relationships, communities and public spaces. Art is a way of living and living is a form of resistance. Considering people's lived encounters with violence, living becomes a central concept. What does living and being alive mean in this context? For the answer to this question, I draw on a conversation with Mohamed Wa Baile and Nataliia Hradynovych, led by



Nina Hurni for Journal B (2025).

Living is so central to the identity of this community space because for many of its members, death is not far. On the wall just above bookshelves of decolonial, anti-racist, feminist and other resistance literature, we can find the names of the people who died as a result of police violence, in detention, or in mental health institutions. This memorial "*Helvetzia*" was created by Mohamed Wa Baile and corresponds to a poem with the same title (Wa Baile, 2021). Mohammed Wa Baile has experienced the struggle against violent police checks on his own body throughout his life, and his resistance to this oppressive practice has led to repeated arrests, searches and checks. At some point, he realized: "I can die here and the police will then form a version of me that is aggressive and violent — even though I'm not" (Journal B, 2025). Mohammed Wa Baile is a co-founder of the Alliance Against Racial Profiling in

Switzerland, which supports various legal cases against racial profiling. Living Room is a place where resistance to these forms of violence is being organized.

This fear that death gets too close, can come to get us or our loved ones, is also very present for Nataliia Hradanovych. She is part of a collective of female artists that fled from Ukraine and who have been using Living Room as their second home and workplace. Here they exhibited the project *Turbulence*, which deals with the current, turbulent times. Part of it is a photo exhibition by the photographer Olga Subotinas, who documented her family's flight from Kiev to Bern. One of the photos pictures her



daughter's birthday during this exhausting journey. It shows the friction between the destruction caused by violence and how life goes on at the same time. When the war broke out on February 24 2022, Olga Subotinas was preparing to celebrate her wedding anniversary. Exactly three years later she is in Living Room for the opening of her exhibition. This day at Living Room is also marked by the friction between commemorating the war and celebrating life.

For Claske Dijkema, the women in the artist collective, in particular Nataliia Hradanovych, are beacons of feminist resistance. Next to being artists they are also mothers, who have built a new life in Switzerland for themselves and their children. Their children made up an important part of the audience and participated through their own performances. When discussing this event, Claske Dijkema shares how touched she was when Nataliia Hradanovych says: "we still have to live" and Mohammed Wa Baile responds: "that's why we have the Living Room! Here, all of us who are always fighting out there can simply live" (Journal B, 2025).

*image: Nataliia Hradanovych with her elder son on the left, watching the performance of her younger son during the vernissage of the exhibition *Turbulence*. Photo: Olga Subotinas, February 24 2025*

However, the question remains who is included in this notion of “we” and “all of us”, as Mohamed Wa Baile mentioned earlier.

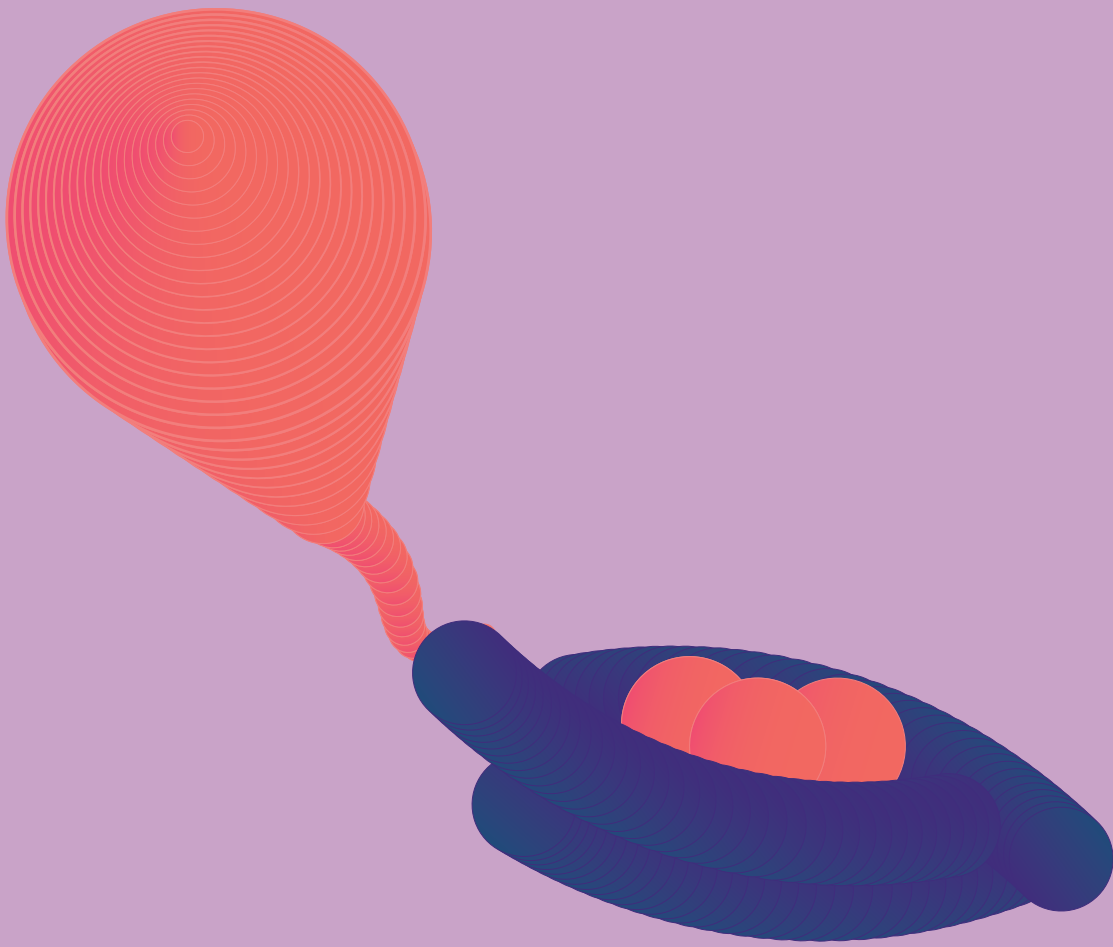
It has become clear that Living Room has been opened by and for People of Color and people with migration experience, together with allies. The presence of the Ukrainian artist collective taking up space in Living Room is not self-evident. The preferential treatment of Ukrainian refugees by the Swiss State and their depiction in many mainstream press outlets as a totally different phenomenon than other refugees fleeing war and genocide has once again confirmed the double standards of which lives are considered grievable (Butler 2016), as well as the importance of anti-racist work. This preferential treatment by the Swiss State and NGOs may also have caused feelings of resentment among People of Color and anti-racist activists in Bern. As so many organizations turned their attention and funds to Ukraine, Living Room kept its focus on migration from the global South, anti-racist and decolonial questions. That is, at least, until Ukrainian graffiti artist Olga Sabadin and Chechnyan painter Sultan Abaev pushed open the doors of Living Room, struck up a conversation and asked whether they could use the space for their artwork. From here, one thing led to another. Mohamed Wa Baile admits that seeing these intimate photos of the war in Ukraine and interacting with Ukrainian artists in Living Room allows him to reconnect with this struggle. The struggles that participants in the Living Room are involved in are very different. However, the shared experience of being confronted with oppression is a unifying factor. Art helps to make these experiences tangible. The community around Living Room has changed over time — it has definitely widened its audience, but possibly also lost some of its initial members. The claiming of the space by different communities has once again raised the question: if Living Room cannot be a place for all, for whom should it be? Is it important to define this and who can/should make these decisions? How to refrain from fixing its identity? Can the space be left/kept open for those willing and ready to claim it?

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Securing Housing in the Continuum of Freedom of Movement

Likedeelerei Kollektiv

Likedeelerei
Hamburg

Based on an assumed global right to a good life, for us, the right to freedom of movement and the right to housing need to follow as a base for a successful reproduction of everyday life. Being able to sleep safely, knowing that my children and I do not have to fear for our home due to a lack of wages or social benefits, is an important resource in life.

Housing Beyond Profit

Securing housing is a basic idea of the German tenement Syndicate "*Mietshäuser Syndikat*". Houses are bought by those who live in them to prevent rent speculation, ensure long-term stable rents and utilize the opportunity for those who live in a place to shape it. This form of house ownership, not as individual, but as collective property, is based on a legal form that is otherwise used more for capitalist companies, in this case a limited liability company (GmbH). This legal status is formed by two associations: the house association, i.e. the residents, and a second association, the Mietshäuser Syndikat itself, in order to secure a right of veto against a sale. The idea is great and has taken many houses off the property market in the long term since the end of the 1980s.

Starting the Project Likedeelerei

However, buying and managing the property is a complicated procedure and people who live particularly precarious lives and are disadvantaged on the housing market do not necessarily have the best chances of being



seen as strong negotiating partners in bank negotiations, for example. The houses are usually financed through a mixture of bank loans and many loans from private individuals. People with less social and cultural capital have less favorable starting conditions here. Managing the administration of the house and the company is also easier for people who are familiar with, in this case, German bureaucracy. Those who have to co-finance others with their wages also have less capacity in time and money to organize a house project. So we have decided to take on these parts, as people who have the means to do so, and then to rent out the living space to cooperation partners at a cost rent (without profit and secured in the long term). We also want to find solutions to problems, especially with rent payments, instead of reacting with the cancellation of the rent contract, as is the case on the free housing market.

From a feminist perspective, *'my body, my choice'* is the basis that politically emphasizes the need for a right to freedom of movement for all people, and thus also a right to arrival and care for oneself and one's environment. The connection between freedom of movement and the right to housing is logical in this context. Good housing means having space in your head for other challenges in life. It is easier to give children what they need when there is no worry about the future of the living space or the stress caused by its confinement. Thinking about living space differently also means having the chance to think about care in everyday life, for oneself, for one's closest people and neighborhood environment, and perhaps also being able to take responsibility for social issues.

Housing for those with Fewer Privileges

These ideas are part of the motivation for launching the project *"Likedeelerei"* (name based on a crew of pirates). The experience from Wilhelmsburg Solidarisch (see p. 65) shows that organizing in everyday life is possible, empowering, and even has strong moments against exclusion and structural discrimination. The limits of organizing in the district to fight against bureaucracy and bosses often lie in access to housing. Defending housing is one thing, gaining access to new accommodation beyond established personal networks and trickery is almost an impossibility. The competition for housing within the Metropolitan area has not yet left its turbo spiral. Especially within metropolises with a continuing growth rate and the simultaneous expiry of old social housing from the 1980s, rents continue to explode. In capitalist fashion, this allows the owners of good housing not only to keep raising rents, but also to choose freely among applicants. Racism, income and a hypothetical long-term perspective of secure rent payments are tough criteria in the race for a rent contract.

Our motivation for this project draws on the awareness of the possibility to purchase housing collectively, the intention to remove it from the market, and the formation of numerous 'left-wing' housing project groups. Our vision was to create a secure and sustainable form of housing for all those who far too often encounter closed doors in the housing market - despite the fact that a precarious life all the more urgently demands a stable foundation in at least one area.

We have therefore adapted the legal form of the Mietshäuser Syndikat as described above to our project. We buy housing financed through traditional bank loans and with private loans from people who want to invest their money in a social project rather than in the capital market. Those credits have low interest rates, so we can guarantee

low rents. We are also working with subventions for long-term social housing.

The big challenge is the question of renting itself. Unfortunately, the costs of buying as well as financing loans also means that we have to take rents. We, too, traditionally think landlords are rubbish, but now it's us taking on the challenge of taking on that role. We have decided to accept this contradiction, to try to organize housing differently, to shape the relationship between tenants and landlords more equally. We have ideas, we encounter problems, we want to organize better, we fail, we argue, we struggle to reach an understanding, we try again.

Rethinking the Role of Landlord and Tenant

There are three key moments in the relationship around the housing to be allocated: firstly, who gets the scarce housing. To try a fair way, we work with cooperation partners, initially these are three groups of self-organized refugees. In consultation with the groups about the respective living space and its conditions (location, neighborhood, size, accessibility, noise, etc.), we discuss who might need and fit the accommodation in question. The groups are a resource for contact for further questions and mediation.

The second phase is the period of residence itself. We try to take into account tenants' requests for renovations as well as requests to postpone refurbishments so that they can live in peace. In case of problems with rent payments, bureaucracy, subletting or whatever else, we try to find solutions together. Providing tenants with knowledge about the requirements of authorities and contracts as well as talking about budget restrictions is always a challenge. Landlord-tenant relations are almost never democratic, so taking responsibility for housing is a learning process. It is also clear that interests are not always aligned. As much as we try to make the tenancy more participatory in many areas, it remains a tenancy under social constraints in which the high price of property and loan agreements force us, for the project, to insist on rent payments and also to ensure that the health of the residents and the housing itself are not jeopardized.

The third aspect is the rent level. We estimate a target rent based on the costs and then discuss with the tenants whether this can be achieved. The previous rent level, ideas of renovation and social benefits are part of this discussion. Flexible rents or reductions in case of a loss of income or jointly agreed increases to cover costs for refurbishments are some examples. And yet: the balance of power between those who are in need of a flat and us who rent it cannot be denied.

Working on the project Likedeelerei involves various activities. We want to respond quickly to needs of renovation, demands from tenants or problems with rent payments. We manage bookkeeping and administration for the flats and houses as well as for the company itself. Calculations, the administration of private loans or online and offline office structure are further fields of our work. A big part is of course the development of new projects, buying houses, developing new financing models, supporting refurbishments and, in the current case, constructing a new house from scratch. Project development and much more is done on a voluntary basis; we aim to be able to pay the part of the administration work in the long run in order to have time to do this work well. Public relations reach out in both directions, to solicit support and to spread our idea.

Care within our Collective

How do we manage to organize care for ourselves in all of this? We work as a collective and try to deal with each other in honesty and navigate through conflict. We all are part of this project because we want to take on the challenge of designing better housing instead of watching it become a luxury for only a few. The many fields of work are moments of permanent learning and therefore a source of enthusiasm for the project. We could certainly be better at stress-care and in managing too much in too little time. So far, we have succeeded in having a transparent exchange about money and needs, as well as making space for our different capacities, resilience, passions, and different ways of organizing our 'everyday working life'. As long as only a small part of our work is paid, we try to organize our income and jobs outside of Likedeelerei in ways that make sure we have the resources to continue Likedeelerei in a sustainable way in the long run. We are aware of the need, as a militant work collective, to consider healthy work and reproduction as the basis for long-term sustainability.

For more information: likedeelerei.org / kontakt@likedeelerei.org / also on Insta

An abstract graphic on a solid red background. A large, thick, dark blue curved shape, resembling a stylized 'C' or a protective shield, dominates the left and center. From the top left, two green, branching, root-like or tree-like structures extend upwards and to the right. Another similar green structure is positioned on the right side, below the main blue shape. The entire composition is framed by a series of concentric, semi-transparent red circles that form a border around the central elements.

II. **Creativity in Resistance**



An abstract graphic on a solid red background. A dark blue, stylized hand with thick, rounded fingers is shown from the wrist up, holding a large, teardrop-shaped object. The teardrop has a green-to-purple gradient and is composed of many thin, concentric, curved lines that create a sense of depth and movement. The hand's fingers are curled around the teardrop, with the thumb and index finger clearly visible.

Art as Protest

**Creating Spaces for
Refugees, Migrants,
& Marginalized People
to Find Peace**

Elsebeth Frederiksen

Olga Lyoka

Claske Dijkema

Odnos Society & Almen Modstand & Wir Alle Sind Bern
Ljubljana & Aarhus & Bern

In the face of challenges such as eviction threats, deportation, or the constant stress of living as a refugee, migrant, or marginalized individual, art offers a powerful tool for both protest and healing. Through creative projects, we can raise awareness, amplify voices, and create spaces of solidarity and respite for those most in need.

One way to channel this power is through public murals and facade paintings. These artistic interventions can transform public spaces into symbols of protest, reflecting the struggles and resilience of refugees, migrants, and marginalized communities. The artworks can make visible the often-invisible experiences of these groups, thus offering symbols of hope, unity, and empowerment.

Additionally, smaller, wearable pieces of art like brooches can also play a significant role. These brooches can act as personal symbols of solidarity, each one representing a unique story or experience of those facing displacement, discrimination, or exclusion. As wearable art, they provide a way for refugees, migrants, and marginalized people to express their identities and struggles, while also serving as a powerful reminder to others of the need for justice and empathy.

These examples — whether murals or brooches — show how both art and handicraft can serve as both a form of protest and a means of healing, creating opportunities for individuals to express solidarity, find peace, and take a break from the daily struggles of displacement, exclusion, and uncertainty. These artistic interventions can provide a way for refugees, migrants, and marginalized people to feel seen and supported, while also fostering a broader sense of community and connection.

In these difficult times, art can be a transformative tool, allowing people to reclaim their voices, find moments of solace, and become part of something larger than themselves.

Happy Mural Painters Project in Aarhus, Denmark

The Happy Mural Painters project is an initiative that started in Gellerupparken, a residential area located in Aarhus, Denmark. The area is undergoing a major urban transformation marked by demolitions, new constructions, and renovations, creating both uncertainty and a sense of loss among residents. Many of the current buildings are no longer being maintained, especially those slated for demolition under Denmark's controversial "ghetto law" (later rebranded as the "Parallel Society Law"). In response to this situation, a group of activists, residents, and artists has launched an initiative to create colorful and meaningful murals throughout the area. The murals



top to bottom, and left to right:

1. Mural on an abandoned building. Picture taken by Elsebeth Frederiksen, September 2020.
2. Dove symbolizing the quest for peace. Picture taken by Elsebeth Frederiksen, November 2024.
3. The "clown bus" being driven by a local resident. The passengers are Danish politicians and local representatives. Taken in April 2025 by Helle Hansen.



are designed by local residents in collaboration with the artist Thomas Kruse.

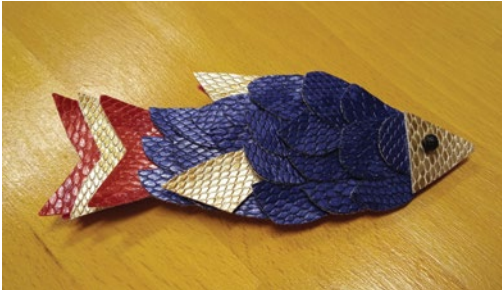
These murals are painted on building façades and in stairwells that are either empty or nearly empty. A unique aspect of the project is the active participation of the residents who live in the stairwell themselves, who contribute their own ideas and symbols reflecting their cultural identity and hopes for the future.

Among the motifs are Palestinian, Danish, and Lebanese flags, olive trees, birds, peace symbols, trees, flowers, and watermelons — all elements with deep significance to many within the community. For example, a “clown bus” is painted on one wall (image 3), as one of the residents is a bus driver. There are also paintings of things that are meaningful to the individual residents, such as the Palestinian flag, the Danish flag, watermelons (image 4), birds, doves of peace (image 2). The latest mural was also the first to be painted on an abandoned building (image 1).



The initiative not only brings color and life to Gellerupparken, but also fosters a strong sense of connection between the painters and the residents. It serves as a break from the daily struggles with housing associations, the municipality, and other challenges, offering a peaceful platform to express pride and solidarity. The Happy Mural Painters project is a powerful example of how art can be used as a positive and constructive response to change and uncertainty, helps preserve the identity of the neighborhood and provides hope during times of upheaval.

Local residents in this area are not always vocal in debates and prefer not to have their pictures taken, but they have experienced a sense of community with the other painters involved in the project. By decorating their stairwells, which are not maintained by the housing association, they create something nice to look at and feel that their particular stairwell is their own.



Sustainable Creativity: Building Bridges with Migrants through Brooches

Any crafting or art workshops can be a time for beauty, creativity and peace. The workshops described here provide a calm environment — a space to rest or take a break from everyday struggles. While their main purpose is to provide a space and time to relax and unwind, the workshops can also be thematic, engaging with themes that are close to people's hearts: remembering the motherland, the thrills of a new country, dearest memories, new friends or experiences, or sharing one's cultural or family heritage.

As a volunteer migrant, I had found myself alone and quite lonely in my new country. Many things had turned out very differently from what I expected. As a hobby artist, I also struggled with and suffered from the lack of ability to communicate with local artists.

It felt like a miracle to be part of the project that opened its doors for me. I met wonderful people that have given me the opportunity to develop my own workshop for those in emotional need.

My workshop is named the “eco-friendly memory brooch” and is open for everybody now, but initially my idea was to provide migrants with a space to forget about their daily struggles for at least an hour, to have the chance to focus on something more pleasant: going through the materials such as textiles, beads, threads, focusing on drawing and imagining and then making the drawing come true. To get this feeling of being able to achieve one simple goal within this hour or two, to believe in themselves again. Something that I had needed so badly and had no-one to give it to me.

As a volunteer and a hobby artist, I don't have my own space to conduct this workshop. However, I am connected to several organizations working with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, and whenever they have a group that needs some relaxing creative time, I am there for them. These



organizations also make sure that the workshops take place in various creative spaces and even in museums and galleries.

The idea of the workshop is also to introduce people to sustainability, something that continues to inspire me. Therefore, all the brooches are made from the remnants of textiles from my own crafting projects and from other tailors. Nothing is wasted and real masterpieces are created at the end.

The workshop starts with the participants going through all the materials that are displayed on a big table or a couple of smaller tables. There are smaller and bigger pieces of cotton, wool, synthetic fabric of various colors and patterns. There are beads, buttons, ribbons, knitting and cross-stitching threads. Then I suggest that the participants think of the person for whom this brooch will be made; for themselves, some relative or friend. The workshop participants all receive paper, pens and pencils to design their brooches. I explain the process of putting the brooch details together. Depending on the group, I turn on background music, or might offer some energizing or relaxing exercises before the workshop. I try to share some information about myself, my experiences, or the workshop itself, and I try to encourage the participants to share something they feel comfortable sharing.

I know how much we all miss our beloved homelands, and I want to help to remember the beauty of the countries themselves, the history and culture, and bring it all into the brooches to share these wonderful moments with the other workshop participants. That's why the workshop is called "memory brooches" — to remember and share.

People create at different speeds, and some might finish their brooch while others haven't yet. I then suggest to make another brooch and/or pick up material for the next brooch, that they can also finish at home. If people are not in a hurry, I ask them to stay until everybody finishes their crafting process — to take photos of the brooches, to share what their masterpieces represent and speak about how they felt while making it.

What I want to say here is: even though at some point you might think that your effort as a crafter, artist or gardener is not good enough for helping migrants, refugees or asylum seekers or meeting their needs — stop thinking like that. I've been there too, and I can tell that sharing even a small amount of your time, imagination and kindness can give people wings to fly to their biggest goals.



Songs of Resistance

Madison Lindsay
Christiana Adeniyi

Almen Modstand & BIPOC Ukraine and Friends
Copenhagen & Berlin

Introduction

We can sing a lullaby to soothe a child, a psalm to mourn a loss, a ballad to gather our neighbors, a heavy metal cry to acknowledge our anger inside. Resistance is persistence, care, and survival. It is love and joy and humor, and music is a form of resistance.

To both recognize and celebrate this core tool of resistance, we have collected songs from activists and organizers who participated in the Translocal Winter Academy, as well as from others in our networks. Here you can find that playlist, “Songs of Resistance,” with a QR code to listen further.

Music can support, empower, and encourage activists and communities in their work, whether at protests, meetings, or during times of rest. Music has the power to create a sense of belonging, and can help maintain lasting community involvement. We draw inspiration from different songs, artists, genres, and feelings of music. Some are quite specific to the place and time of a particular struggle, while others cross oceans and decades without losing their spirit.

Listening to music can give an ephemeral sense of what it is like for different activists to work through their struggles. What it's like to demonstrate on the streets, just as much as to recuperate at home. Celebration and joy are found alongside feelings of anger and sorrow. We can see this in the quotes from contributors to the playlist. They describe why they have shared the song with us, and what it means for their struggles.

To further investigate the relationships between identity, struggle, and music, we've included an interview between Christiana (Khristy King) and her DJ mentor about the power of music in effecting change. We hope it can be a reminder of the power of music, art, and community in the work we each are struggling for.

Excerpts from an Interview with NaN and Khristy King

NaN: My first step into music goes way back to my childhood. I used to record songs from the radio on to tapes, making my first mixtapes at 10 or 11. Back then, I didn't even realize that I was technically DJing. As a teenager living outside London, and later at university in the city, I became obsessed with DJs, dreaming of doing what they did, though it seemed inaccessible. My friends and I bonded over music, but no one showed me how to DJ.

Collective Playlist

Difference	Benjamin Clementine
I Am Her	Shea Diamond
I'm A Woman	Deborah Coleman
Who Knows	Marion Black
Chain of Fools	Aretha Franklin
It's a Man's Man's Man's World	Etta James
FREEDOM	Jon Batiste
A Little Too Much	Shawn Mendes
I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free	Nina Simone
Mind on Fire	Aisha Badru
We Are Here	Alicia Leys
Words	Seinabo Sey
We're Not Gonna Take It	Twisted Sister
Four Women	Nina Simone
Talkin' Bout a Revolution	Tracy Chapman
Redemption Song	Bob Marley & The Wailers
Is This Love	Bob Marley & The Wailers
Revolution	Kirk Franklin & The Family
Get Up, Stand Up	Bob Marley & The Wailers
99 Luftballons	Nena
Désobéissance Civile	Keny Arkana
With Every Intention	Boysetsfire
La Rage	Keny Arkana
The Violence	Rise Against
Antifa Hooligans	Los Fastidios
Warten auf Wind	Dota Kehr
True Bypass	Wayward Atom
After The Eulogy	Boysetsfire
Cinquième Soleil	Keny Arkana
Abend in Der Stadt	Aufbruch
Anarchy Camp	NOFX
I'm A Better Anarchist Than You	David Rovics
Fuck The Police	N.W.A.
Get Up, Stand Up	Bob Marley & The Wailers
Oh Palestina	Fauno Rockfolk
People Have The Power	Patti Smith
Fortunate Son	Creedence Clearwater Revival
Lohn Isch Da	Teddy Teclebrrian, Antoine Burtz
Macht Euch Laut	Madsen
Womanarchist	Bad Cop, Bad Cop
None Of Us Are Free	The Blind Boys Of Alabama, Solomon Burke
Pearls	Sade



“...The industry felt gate-kept, male-dominated, and unapproachable.”

NaN: I remember playing at a Daytimers event, a South Asian collective, and afterward, a friend told me I “possessed” people with my set. Hearing that felt like validation — that’s what I aim for, to tell a story through my sets, taking listeners on a journey and leaving them transformed.

Khristy King: What social or cultural issues are you most passionate about, and how do you incorporate them into your music?

NaN: I prioritize music by BIPOC artists who share their stories — of joy, struggle, injustice, and resilience. Music is a powerful medium for addressing social justice, inequality, and racism. I’m passionate about dismantling white supremacy, which remains pervasive, even in Berlin’s white-dominated industry.

“... For me, music must align with my politics and purpose; otherwise, there’s no point in playing.”

Khristy King: What role do DJs and music producers have in driving societal and cultural change?

NaN: DJs have immense power because music brings people together — it’s therapeutic, spiritual, and communal. However, club culture has been commodified, losing focus on connection and community. DJs must decide: prioritize fame or foster a space where people connect and dance together. I long for the pre-social media era when clubs were about shared experiences, not celebrity culture. DJs can drive change by rethinking priorities, creating inclusive spaces, and using their platforms responsibly.

Khristy King: Music brings people together, breaking barriers. I remember moving from Ukraine to Germany — so many emotions bottled up. One winter event changed everything. I danced to Afrobeat and let go, even if just briefly, of the stress from bureaucracy and adjusting to a new life.

“...That moment of freedom made me see how music connects us and builds community.”

NaN: Collaborations are key. Working in collectives makes organizing events manageable and diverse. Everyone brings their own style, which keeps things fresh. For example, I’ve worked with feminist radio stations in Mexico. Connecting with local communities — especially women fighting injustices — has been deeply

grounding and inspiring.

Khristy King: Music clearly impacts not just people, but also organizing efforts. What role has it played for you in activism?

NaN: Last year, when the Palestine genocide escalated, grief overwhelmed many. I organized fundraisers in Berlin where music offered a safe space after protests. It wasn't just about dancing, but also about releasing emotions, processing trauma, and staying united. Music is therapy — it connects us, even in activism. Events like "Black Communion" showed how music can channel spiritual and collective energy.

Khristy King: Absolutely. Music carries stories and dreams across generations. Historically, it's been a way to resist, share hope, and organize. I see it in marches and movements worldwide.

NaN: Exactly. Music's power is undeniable. When governments want control, the first thing they suppress is music and dance. During the pandemic, clubs were among the first spaces that were closed. In places like Kuwait, music has been stripped away, making it underground and forbidden. That's why we must keep creating these spaces — they're vital for unity.

NaN: Don't forget the power of music. It's not just about the commercial industry or mainstream spaces. Focus on what it means to you and your community.

"... That's where its true strength lies."

Reflections

Each artist has their own relationship to music, influenced by intersections of their identities, experiences, and perspectives. In this interview, NaN and Khristy shared the way they navigate music, both as a form of expression and beauty, but also as a social and political environment. Their specific personal identities have shaped the way they interact with music, and music in turn has affected how they continue to resist in their struggles. We can see this reflected in the submitted songs as well. Some songs are tied to specific contexts, whether for defending the Kurdish people, documenting movements of resistance in Georgia, or resisting police violence. As we listen, these songs will have a different impact on each of us, because we carry different stories, and hear them through different lenses. The intersectionality of music, its pervasiveness across cultures and times and places, does not mean it sounds the

same in all of these contexts. Music is conceived of in different ways across different cultures. For some, it might simply be a way to listen passively and relax. For others, it is a creative process, connecting to the world and communities around us through sound. The beats of some songs can encourage our feet to march, to synchronize our rhythms with hundreds of our comrades walking alongside us. To others, we might share our sorrows, express our identities, or recall deep narratives of our heritage. For many, music is a tool of survival. It gives us a space and a time to move, to dance, to be with others. Music's joy is not purely for fun, but for resistance against oppression. Music itself resists a definable structure. Its rules are perhaps not even rules.

Whether oppressed by race, gender, ability, sexuality, beliefs, and so on, movement to music falls outside what can be controlled. In this way, music can be both personal and political, individual and shared. At the core of all of our struggles, is a shared need for community and care. The act of resisting is thus tied deeply to the act of caring for ourselves, our comrades, our families, and our communities. Song can be heard across a city, through the walls, along the street. It can come from within us, or be amplified by those around us.



Poetry as a Form of Resistance

Anteja Tomašič

Mohammad Hazrati

Abas Bakhshinejad Taleshbejari

ECSEuro Research Team & The Peace Institute & various NGO's in Ljubljana
Ljubljana

Writing poetry has always played an important role in expressing the emotions evoked in individuals by their surroundings, social inequalities, and changes. It can be therapeutic, serve as a testimony, a resource, or a rebellious expression to amend injustices (Olszewska, 2015; Collins, 2016). Crafting rhymes holds special significance for those living in hostile environments, as well as for forcibly displaced individuals in their struggle against the authorities and the circumstances that forced them to leave. Poetry often bridges these two groups, inspires hope and resistance, and helps spread the ideas of specific social movements locally and globally. Furthermore, poetry is significant in individuals' lives, as it can articulate one's deepest thoughts or serve as a form of therapy (Mazza, 2003). This text will use poems from various parts of the world to illustrate how poetry serves as a form of resistance in both the public and private sphere for communities enduring conflict and forced migration. We included both poems and lyrics to highlight the fact that in some countries, public singing, particularly for women, is censored or prohibited.

Public sphere

In the wake of a global wave of rising authoritarianism, disinformation, and misinformation, the space for free expression is shrinking. Under the pretext of national security, counter-terrorism, and defamation, governments and powerful institutions regularly violate basic human rights. They seek to control information flows and stifle criticism, restricting people's rights and freedoms¹. Across the globe, various regimes have aimed to enforce strict limitations on what constitutes acceptable forms of activism. Poets who write about seemingly trivial subjects, such as love and freedom, and peacefully highlight the injustices in their society, are often viewed as institutional threats. Despite the danger of persecution for their work, writing poetry possesses an unrivaled power, as it provides a peaceful means of resisting authorities and fosters a collective desire for change. Artists who endure difficult conditions often inspire both those within their community and those who have managed to escape.

In Iran, poetry has historically played an important role in political activism and the struggle for systemic change. Protest movements such as "Woman, Life, Freedom", which began after the violent murder of Mahsa Amini on September 16, 2022, challenge regime prohibitions in creative ways, employing various mediums, including artistic performances and poetry. As a result, those involved in such movements constantly face the danger of being convicted by the Iranian regime. One notable case is that of Shervin Hajipour, a 27-year-old Iranian musician who was sentenced to three years in

1. icorn.org/about

prison in 2024 for “inciting and provoking people to riot to disturb national security”². Following Mahsa Amini’s death, he gathered various Twitter posts about the reasons for protesting and created a song titled *Baraye* (“For”). In 2023, he received a special Grammy for Best Song for Social Change³. His song addresses several issues, such as the rights of women, children, refugees, and animals; environmental concerns; recession and poverty; freedom of speech; and political corruption. Although he was later released, the Iranian regime banned him from leaving the country. He remains determined to stay in Iran and effect change from within.

*For the jailed beautiful minds;
For the neglected Afghan refugee kids;
For this list that goes on and on.*

[excerpt] “*Baraye*”, Shervin Hajipour⁴

In both Iran and Afghanistan, where women and girls face deep inequality, poetry serves as a powerful form of rebellious expression. For example, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) emphasizes the significance of Afghan women’s poetry. It illustrates how their works can be vital tools for women striving for human rights and social justice in Afghanistan (Brodsky, 2003).

*I am the voice of Afghans’ pain;
Can’t seem to be muted;
I’ve chosen education as my leader;
Can’t seem to be deprived this way.*

[excerpt] “I am a girl from liberal ancestry”; Nilofar Jamal⁵

Abdel Wahab Latinos was a Sudanese poet who drowned in 2020 while attempting to reach what he believed would be a better future⁶. Since 2014, 31,272 people have disappeared while attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea⁷. This figure represents thousands of aspirations for a better life that have ultimately come to rest at the bottom of the sea. Abdel Wahab Latinos’ poems are part of the social initiatives known as “CommemoRActions” — activities that honor individuals who have died, gone missing, or become victims of enforced disappearance while crossing the world’s borders. These efforts are organized by the relatives and friends of those who have died, disappeared, or become victims of enforced disappearances along the land or sea borders of Europe, Africa, and America⁸. One of his poems was spotted on the walls of one of the most popular streets in Palermo, Via Vittorio Emanuele, in July 2022,

2. [theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/01/iranian-singer-given-three-years-in-jail-for-song-about-mahsa-amini-protests](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/01/iranian-singer-given-three-years-in-jail-for-song-about-mahsa-amini-protests)

3. [grammy.com/news/shervin-hajipour-baraye-winner-best-song-for-social-change-watch-2023-grammys-65th-grammy-awards-acceptance-speech](https://www.grammy.com/news/shervin-hajipour-baraye-winner-best-song-for-social-change-watch-2023-grammys-65th-grammy-awards-acceptance-speech)

and it is still partially visible to this day:

*To die at sea, where waves crash
loudly in your head,
Water rocks your body, like a
punctured boat.
Or to die in a wasteland, where fresh
cold tears flow through your body
with pain.*

[excerpt] "Dying at Sea", Abdel Wahab Latinos⁹

Private sphere

Poetry is essential, not only in the context of political activism and social movements, but also in the private lives of forcibly displaced individuals and those enduring hostile environments. Through creative expression, refugees navigate and cope with the emotional challenges and insecurities associated with resettlement. Poetic writing serves to convey personal experiences of injustice, a source of self-understanding, and a way to establish new social networks (Hosseini and Punzi, 2022, 131). Individuals who write poems about their difficult experiences utilize words to articulate their resistance to challenging life circumstances, embodying and releasing negative emotions. Poems often also function as memorials of past events. For Dr. Fatemeh Shams, an Iranian activist and award-winning poet based in Pennsylvania, USA, poetry became a refuge where she could write about personal experiences — such as dancing in public or exploring eroticism — that could not be discussed elsewhere¹⁰. Afghan poet Mohammad Hazrati, based in Slovenia, employs poetry to reflect on family ties and the emotional challenges arising from his physical distance from loved ones.

*I love you, I love you.
I cannot see the tears in your eyes.
I love you, I love you.
I'll be happy when I see your smile
And when you tell me that you love me, you love me.*

[excerpt] "About Love 2", Mohammad Hazrati¹¹

4. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baraye

5. redroompoetry.org/poets/nilofar-jamal/i-am-girl-from-liberal-ancestry

6. arablit.org/2020/08/27/trading-misery-for-death-the-tragic-death-of-a-sudanese-poet

*I am still a child.
And I still dream of being in my mother's arms. People!
This world is not fair because my mother and I had to go our separate ways.
People!*

[excerpt] "About the Mother", Mohammad Hazrati, 2021

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The Soundscape of a Squat

Orchestra PLAC (Ljubljana)

Sandi Abram

ECSEuro Research Team
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Orchestra PLAC (*Orkester PLAC* in the original) was an impromptu orchestra that emerged in autumn of 2022 within the Participatory Ljubljana Autonomous Zone (PLAC) in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The building, formerly a workers' canteen for the Road Company Ljubljana, had been abandoned since 2014 and was reclaimed as an autonomous zone in September 2022. Situated in a degraded post-industrial area spanning approximately 18,000 square meters — on state-owned land positioned between two densely populated neighborhoods — PLAC's transformation from a derelict complex into a reappropriated social centre was driven by squatters who reopened the space to the public through a series of non-profit cultural, educational, and sports activities (Abram 2023).

Among these initiatives, Orchestra PLAC developed as a fluid and informal ensemble, consisting of both professional and amateur musicians, with about ten members participating on a regular basis. The group convened for open jam sessions — referred to as rehearsals — once a week, on Tuesdays. These sessions were publicly announced via PLAC's social media, encouraging spontaneous participation. Rehearsals took place in a former kitchen space (see Hofstetter et al. forthcoming) that had been repurposed as a practice venue, where the interplay of voices and instruments usually unfolded. Depending on the occasion, the soundscape featured layered vocals and an ensemble of instruments, including piano, violins, percussion, trumpets, guitars, trombones, and accordion.

The idea behind forming Orchestra PLAC was to create an inclusive, accessible, and open space where anyone with an affinity for music and grassroots community organizing could socialist during their spare time, connecting with like-minded individuals in a comradely atmosphere. To maintain cohesion within this fluid and ephemeral political-sonic experiment, Orchestra PLAC relied on digital platforms such as Signal and Google Drive, which allowed members to share musical notes and song lyrics with those unable to attend in person, coordinate the repertoire in advance of rehearsals and performances, and occasionally exchange phonetic notations of songs. In doing so, the orchestra facilitated sessions in which both popular songs and their own original compositions could be performed.

Before entering a period of dormancy in late 2024 — with no foreseeable date for reactivation — Orchestra PLAC's repertoire comprised of about ten (folk) songs, thematically centered on internationalism, love, non-heteronormativity, exile, struggles for liberation, longing, anti-war sentiment, anti-fascist resistance, and migration, among others. In the sessions they rehearsed and performed *Bella Ciao* (an Italian

partisan resistance song with folk roots), *Tecco* (a song in the Corsican polyphonic tradition), *La Rue des Lilas* (a chanson as performed by Sylvain Girault), *Kära Min Mor* (a Nordic folk song), *Ochi Chyornye* (a Russian romance with lyrics by Yevhen Pavlovych Hrebinka and a melody attributed to Florian Hermann), *Leno* (a song in the Romani folk tradition, performed by Esma Redžepova-Teodosievska) and *Orel* (a musical adaptation of *Ksenitia tou Erota* by Giorgos Kalogirou). Their original compositions were titled *Li La Ljubljana* and *I'll Plant a Seed*.

By scanning the QR code below, you will be redirected to a 15-minute sound recording



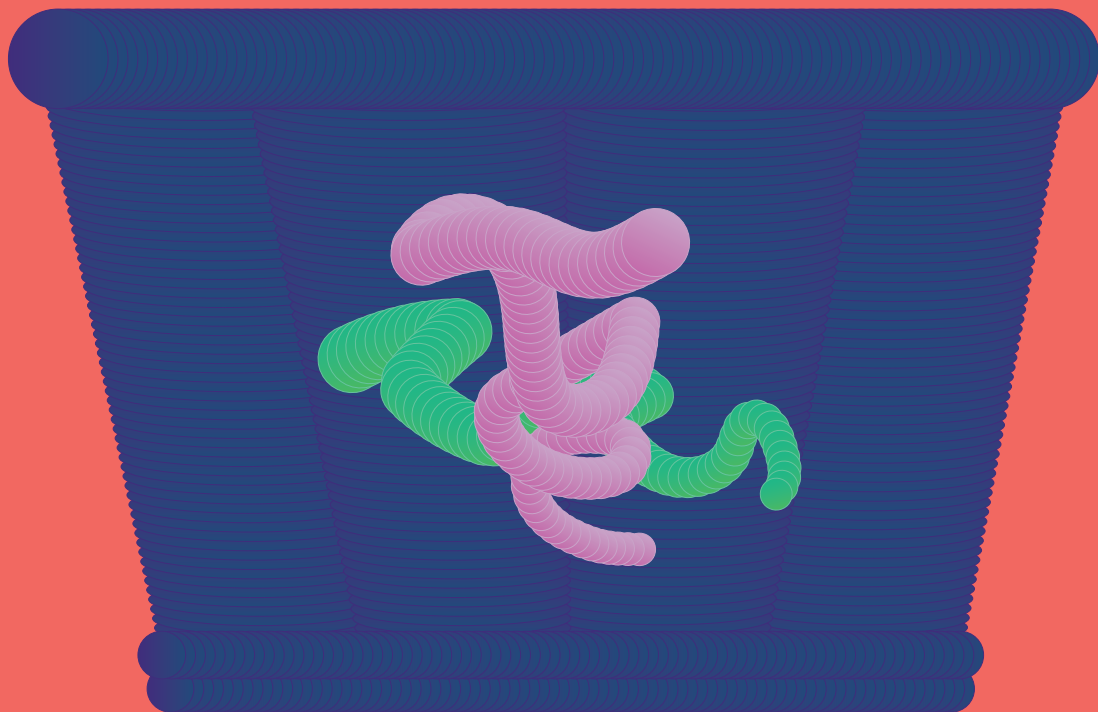
from a rehearsal of Orchestra PLAC. The performance, recorded as an attempt at a more-than-textual form of ethnographic representation (Cox, Irving and Wright 2016), took place on the morning of November 17 2022, the same day the first planned “technical” inspection of PLAC was scheduled to take place by the Bank Assets Management Company (BAMC) — a state institution established to manage non-performing loans and distressed assets from Slovenian banks after the financial crisis, and the de jure owner of the property on which PLAC is located. However, on that day, BAMC decided to cancel the visit, citing the “media event convened by the PLAC community” — which included a performance by Orchestra PLAC — as the reason for their decision, stating that the inspection “cannot be professionally conducted under such circumstances” (Pečan 2022). As of the time of writing, the inspection has never taken place.

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Walls of Protest

**A Photo-Essay on Graffiti, Gentrification
& the Right to the City**

Sandi Abram

ECSEuro Research Team
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Over the past two decades, the city of Ljubljana (Slovenia) has undergone a rapid urban transformation, shaped by shifting modes of urban governance that, to varying degrees and in different phases, have prioritized capital investment, endorsed entrepreneurial approaches to city management, and intensified privatization of public spaces (Mayer, 2017; Abram & Bajič, 2024). The local manifestations of the “neoliberal city” (Hackworth, 2006; Pinson & Morel Journal, 2016) are particularly evident in the expansion of mass tourism (touristification) and the effects of gentrification — both of which have played a significant role in exacerbating the city’s ongoing housing crisis.

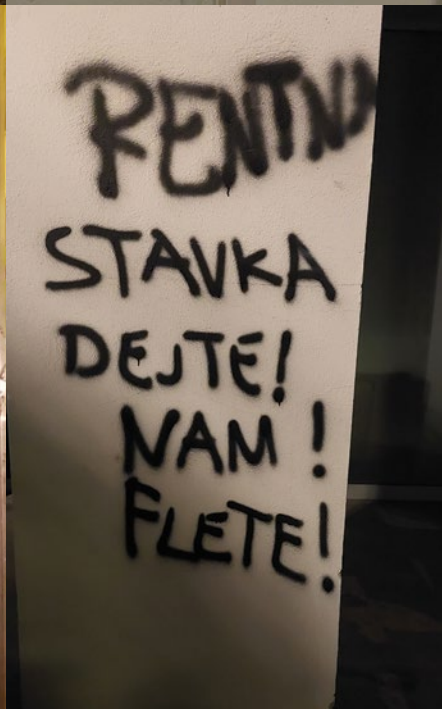
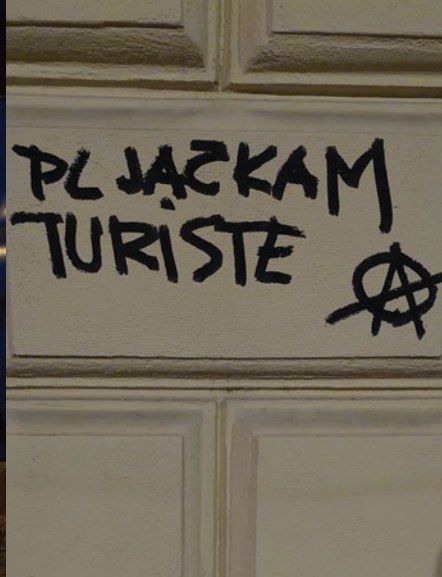
While such structural transformations are often framed in academic discourse through abstractions like “urban crisis” (Weaver, 2017), the radical creativity of the handwritten protest on Ljubljana’s walls serves to ground and translate these processes into a tangible, affective vocabulary of everyday experience (Abram, 2024). In this context, the right to the city (Harvey, 2008) is materialized at street level as the right to spray-paint the city.

This photo-essay of Ljubljana’s graffitiscap offers a curated glimpse into how, in times of crisis, walls “are repurposed as canvases of resistance, which communicate, amplify, and incite embodied resistance” (Carastathis & Tsilimpounidi, 2021, p. 422). The examples presented here — subversive fissures in the form of ephemeral political wall-writing — articulate anti-gentrification and anti-tourism sentiments amid the multiple, overlapping, and persistent crises of capitalism. Read as “hidden transcripts” (Scott, 1990), these graffiti emerge as discourses of the powerless, contesting the dominant forces of neoliberal urbanism through micro-gestures of resistance.



top to bottom:

1. "Against rents. For a decent life." - Sandi Abram
2. "Housing for all." - Sandi Abram
3. "Anti-tourist Alert" - Sandi Abram
4. Graffiti "tourism or life?!". The word "life" was deliberately written in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian



left to right & top to bottom:

5. "Gentrifiers fuck off", written on a billboard render of a luxury commercial-residential building. - Sandi Abram
6. "I'm thieving tourists"
7. Graffiti on a road sign announcing a street redevelopment: To the original message, "We are renovating for you", the inscription "tourists and elites" was added. - Sandi Abram
8. "rental strike / give! / us! / flats!" - Sandi Abram



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image left:



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image right:

10. "Death to bulldozers", written opposite an evicted squat. - Sandi Abram



left to right & top to bottom:

11. "Do you even know what Gentrification means?" - Sandi Abram

12. "F*ck Airbnb" - Sandi Abram



13. "city to the people" - Sandi Abram

14. "I can't live in a Airbnb", written during an anti-gentrification protest. - Sandi Abram



We Are One

**Words That Walk
for Migrant Dignity**

Delmi Galeano

SEDOAC
Madrid

The roads of the world are marked by the footprints of those who walk carrying hope on their backs and memory in their hands. They are millions. Those crossing seas, mountains, borders with their dignity untouched, even if the papers say otherwise.

Migrant workers are not numbers, not statistics, not “labor force.” They are faces, stories, songs that resist. They are the ones doing the unseen work — the work everyone needs. They care, they build, they clean, they cook, they harvest... while those above stuff their pockets and hate speech fills their mouths. But here we are, and here we say: We are one. It doesn't matter the color, the language, the passport. What matters is life. And life is worth the same in every geography.

Dignity Is Not Negotiable

How long will we allow those who need the most to be exploited? How long will we look the other way while our migrant sisters and brothers sleep on the streets, work without contracts, live without rights?

They want us divided, they want us at odds. But we won't give them that pleasure. Because we know that dignity knows no borders. A right denied in one country is a wound on all maps.

That's why we raise our voices. We don't ask for charity — we demand justice. We don't ask for permission — we claim our place. We want full regularization, no excuses. We want fair contracts, decent hours, and respect in every word, in every interaction.

Against Hate, We Sow Humanity

In times when hate screams, we whisper humanity. Where they build walls, we build bridges. Where they sow fear, we sow connection.

Culture is not polluted — it is enriched. Mixing doesn't destroy — it builds. Every new language in a city is a song that city didn't know. Every new dish is a fire lit at the world's table.

There is no invasion where there is encounter. There is no threat where there is embrace. There is only ignorance where love is missing.

The future is built with every hand:

This world won't be fixed from above. Those above have their agendas, their walls, their accounts. This world will be transformed from below. With the hands that plant, the feet that march, and the voices that refuse to be silenced. Because when one migrant is exploited, we are all less free. When one migrant is insulted, we are all less human.

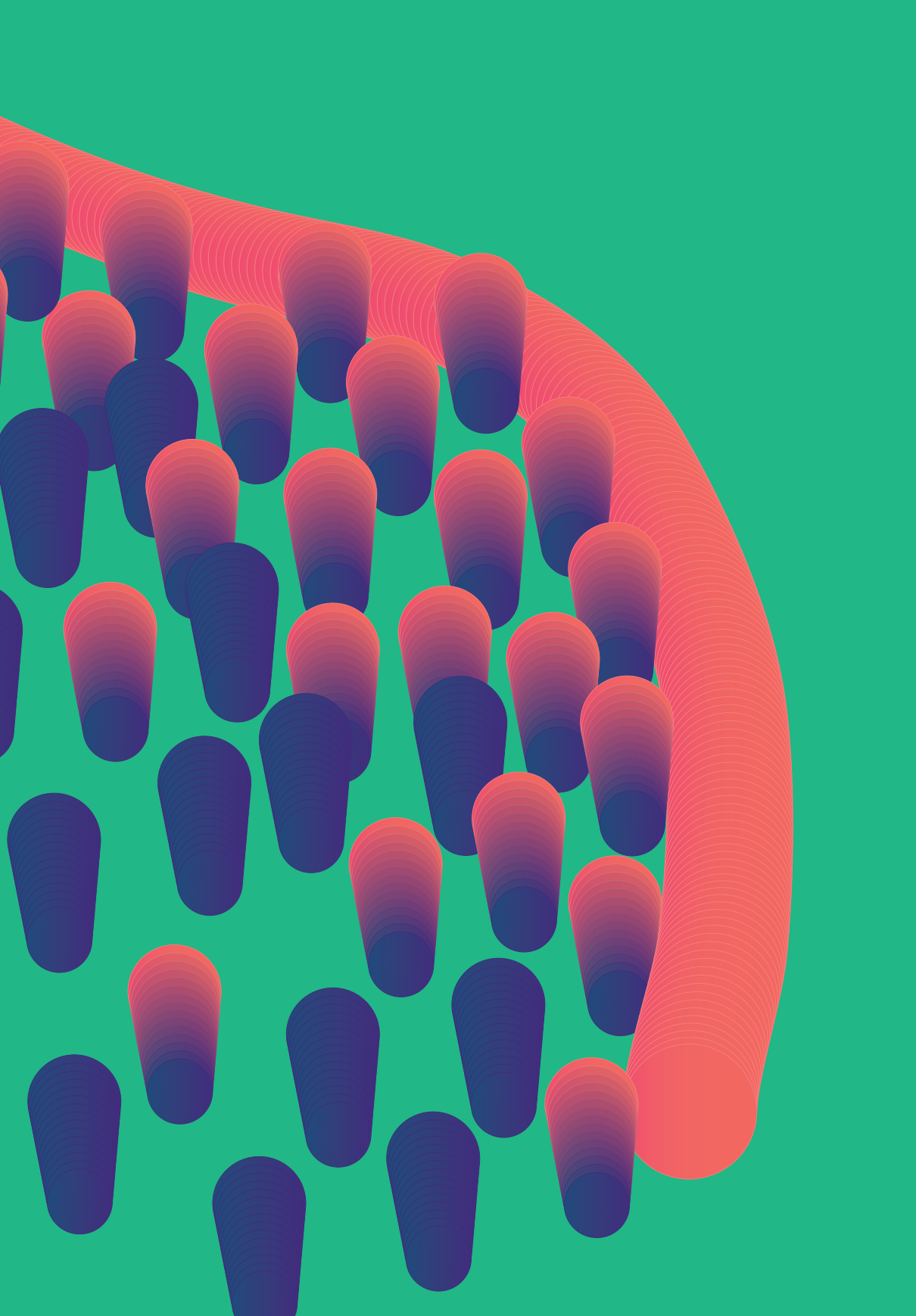
Today, we're not writing a speech. We are weaving a cry. Today we walk word by word toward a world where no one is illegal, where no job is worth less because of an accent.

And today, with our hearts on fire, we say: We are one. And walking together, we will win.

The background is a solid teal color. Scattered across it are numerous teardrop-shaped elements. Most are a dark purple color, but several have a red-to-purple gradient, giving them a 3D, layered appearance. These shapes are distributed across the entire page, with some appearing in the foreground and others receding into the background.

III.

**Tools
for Organizing
Solidarity**



An abstract graphic on a teal background. It depicts a hand with fingers spread, holding a heart. The hand and heart are composed of many concentric, slightly offset lines, creating a sense of depth and movement. The hand is rendered in shades of green and blue, while the heart is a solid pink color.

Tools of Struggle & Care

Madison Lindsay

Almen Modstand
Copenhagen

“Struggle” is a word that has always held a negative connotation for me — a sort of failure, inability, or incompetence. To struggle was to not be doing well. But the “struggles” at the Transurban Winter Academy were otherwise. They were points of pride, what we fight for, what we work through each day. “What is your struggle?” was a curious, genuine question into the core of what we care most about. A struggle was almost a family member to introduce at a party. Here is my struggle. We struggle for that. My struggles seem similar to your struggles. Would you like to meet my struggle? But more than just the objects of our struggles — the goals or focuses — we shared in our ways of struggling, our tools of struggling.

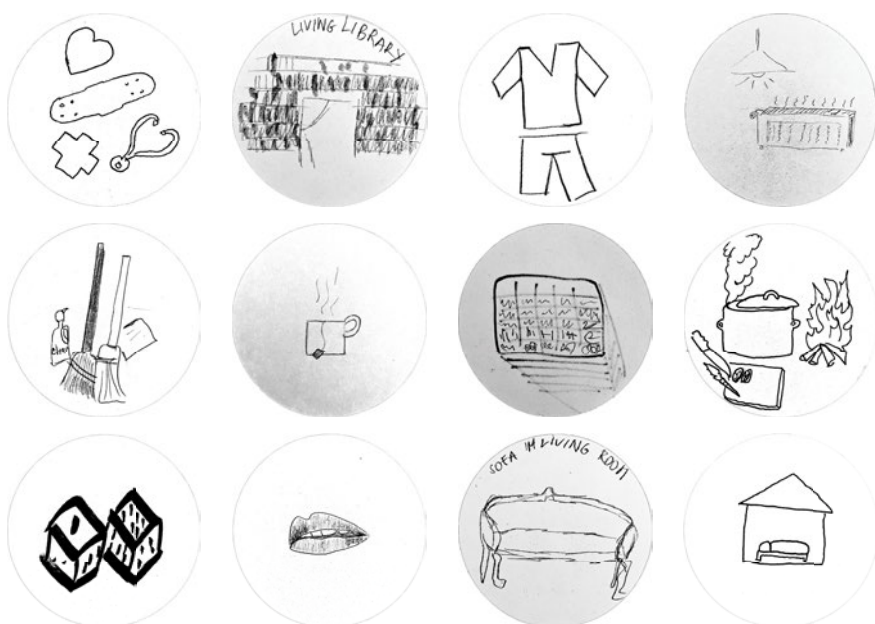
We started with a mapping and diagramming workshop. Each participant was asked to draw a few “tools” that they use in their activism, organizing, research, and so on. Time was short but we drew what first came to mind, then placed the outcomes together, grouping and organizing them by theme. Besides the practical tools one might expect — computers, banners, phones, and flyers — a clear category emerged: that of reproductive labour, or care work. Here one can find brooms and gloves, tea and coffee, radiators and hugs. A couch holds space for conversation, food on the stove feeds long work nights, and first aid kits mend wounds along the way. It is these tools with which we struggle.

Each of the participants’ drawings, each of their tools, was collected and scanned. A few examples are shown here. The work of caring for ourselves and each other was expressed repeatedly as food, water, warmth, and safety, so the collective setting of the drawing emerged as a living room. It seemed that across our different contexts, challenges, and strategies, we shared the understanding that we struggle through caring, and care through struggling. I have attempted to curate the tools from the workshop into a single representation, drawing our collective tools into a shared space of care and struggle.

Although I’ve collected these tools into a type of living room, it ought not imply that our struggles are limited to an introverted sphere, nor that we work alone. Having the space to meet with our comrades, rest from a long day, and share a cup of tea allows us to lead our best “struggle” when we are out in the world. When we stand in protest, negotiate with politicians, and report injustices. Letters are written, calls are taken, books are shared, banners are painted, and meetings are held. Struggle is seen on the streets, online, and at work, but it thrives in our homes, in our care for each other, our communities, and our neighbours.



Back in my own local context of Denmark, with my own struggle of housing discrimination, I am reminded of the shared tools we collected in our collective TUSL living room. Fighting against evictions, demolitions, and privatization can seem to call only for legal actions or blockades. The politicians can seem unreachable, unfluencable, unwilling to listen. Our voices can sound so quiet in front of the Parliament's stone walls. But when we meet for a coffee, share a dance, and make food for our neighbors, the strength of our togetherness seems strong enough to continue struggling. We are able to share the reproductive labour of caring for each other, for our bodies and minds to continue struggling. My struggle is not mine, but ours. We struggle together.





Occupy Social Media

Anonymous

Different groups in the housing, migrants' rights and care work struggles
Bern & Berlin

Hello comrade,

on the following pages, you will find tips for your social media work. In order to mobilize many people, we believe that political education must also be taken to digital platforms such as Instagram, Twitch, TikTok, or Facebook. Leftist narratives that describe aspects of a good life for everyone must also exist online as a practice of resistance. Populist narratives are taking over these platforms, and it's tricky to keep up. Nonetheless, putting your content out there has a confronting and disempowering effect on them.

We should never become dependent on the META group (such as Facebook and Instagram) or other tech giants, or forget that online activism is a rather passive form of resisting a cause. So think carefully beforehand:

- How much work do you want to put into these online platforms?
- What do you want people to take away? (Do you use social media strategically for funding or to organize people?)
- What makes more sense strategically right now: organizing on the streets or agitating online?

Are you looking for further tips and information about social media? *Check out "Occupy Social Media".*¹

How to Get Away With(out) a Shitstorm

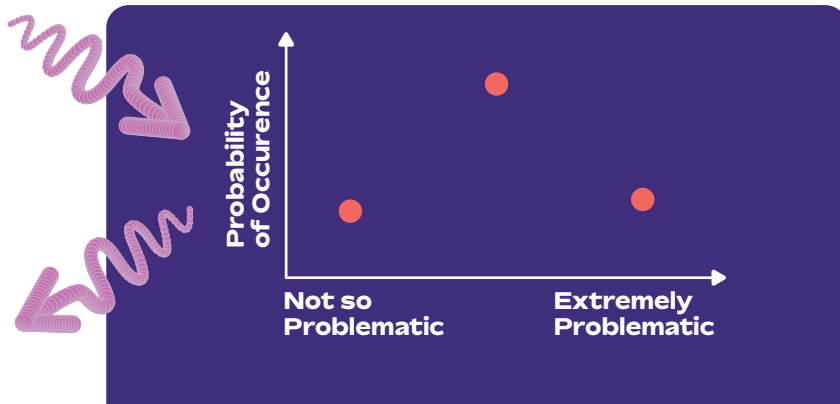
Think about this before launching your (social media) campaign:

- Have you analyzed the target group? If yes, what strategies for the anti-group have resulted from the target group analysis?
- Keep in mind: the attention span for information processing tends to be shorter in today's world!

Ask yourself which media platform actually reflects your concerns and interests and weigh up your resources as to whether you should target your allies or spread your concerns more broadly to the general public.

- Do you want to use a deliberately provocative communication strategy, e.g., to scandalize political happenings?
- What levels of escalation are you planning?

1. See "Occupy Social Media" in *Linktree* (p.157)



To prepare yourself: Draw up a diagram in advance by identifying which topics/claims/features of the debate are most likely to cause a shitstorm.

Step One: Prevention/Preparation

Goal in this step: Have a strategy, assess the crisis.



- Stay calm.
- Check facts (Also ask: what don't we know?).

Step Two: What are topics that have potential for shitstorms? Do the topics have the potential to escalate?

- Which questions/criticisms come up most frequently, and which do you need to address? Break them down into 3–4 main questions.
- React strategically (communication should be in the same language, wording, message, framing).

→ *Write guidelines and brief everyone so that you can control the narrative.*

- Remain factual.
- Tell all relevant information to the outside world at once.

Step Three: Better safe than sorry: Minimize the shitstorm.

- Who is communicating? (You as an individual, your collective?)
- Reminder: Always communicate in the identity of the group.

Step Four: Check resources and also say no, if necessary.

Helpful questions when the shitstorm gets worse:

- Use the opportunity to tell your own story.
- Ask yourself: What is the output you would get if you had to keep responding to the hate/criticism?
- Which bubbles are relevant for you? (e.g., does your group get money from the senate? Is the community behind you? Who are the critics/attackers?)
- Use your community as a compass.

How to Reel your Content

Why focus on reels?

- Keep your audience more engaged and interested.
- We all consume too much content and are therefore looking for quick and easily digestible input.
- You can reach a lot of new people; the algorithm suggests reels based on people's interests but works differently on Instagram and TikTok.
- TikTok actively censors presumably leftist language and thus minimizes your reach.



Before starting to create, ask yourself:

- Who is your target audience, and what speaks to them?
- Which call to action makes people engage further with your cause?
- What is the one thing you want people to remember about your campaign?
- Which type of language will you use to promote your content, depending on the platform?

A few technical details to keep in mind:

- Not longer than 3 minutes
- Do you use the right video resolution?
- Record vertically (9:16)
- Create a nice cover image
- Publication is best during working hours



Dynamic is key!

Social media platforms want you to believe all content is created straight out of everyday life. It wants to seem easy and dynamic, with little effort put into its creation. In the end, producing a reel is quite some work, but the twist is, it should look like very little work.

Therefore, pay attention to your setting:

- What is your background going to be?
- How are you talking to the camera?
- You could move around and change your background during one video.
- If you have different people recording statements, there is even more movement.

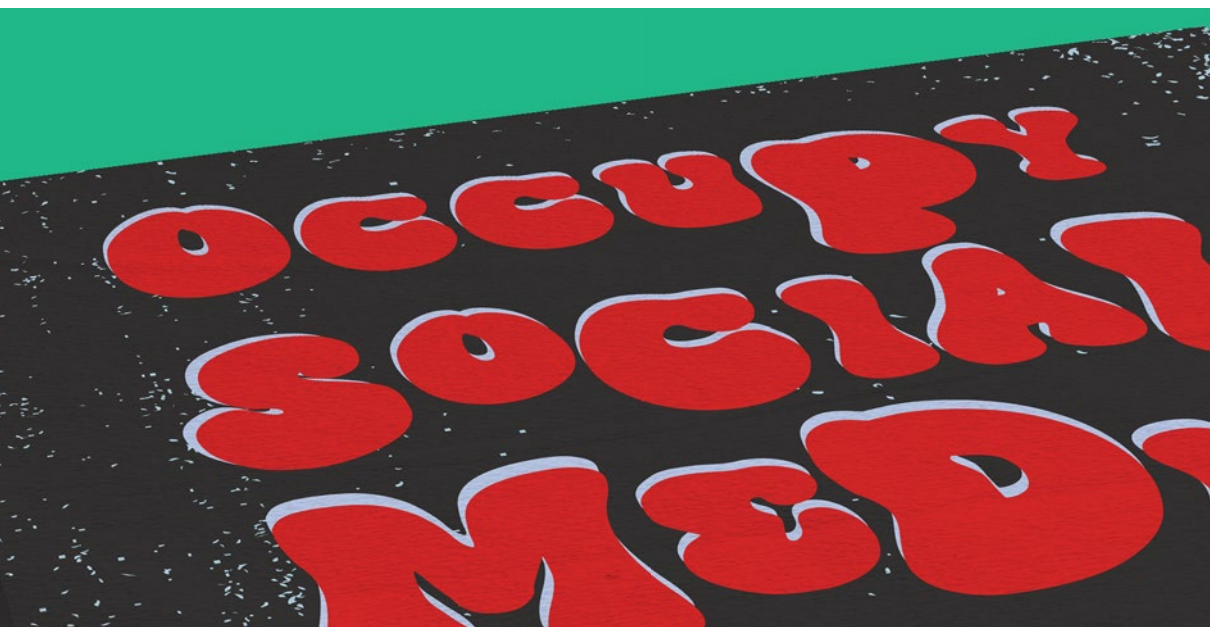
Sound & Timing:



- Think about what you are going to say: Statistics show that users only watch an average of 10 seconds per reel. This means your key messages should be delivered in this time

→ *Think of the one message you want to place at the beginning.*

- Talking fast has become attractive. It's still better to speak in your usual voice. Recording speed can always be adjusted during the editing process.
- Depending on the content, it's good to think of some underlying music — but don't overload it.





Interaction:

- Make sure you are talking directly to the camera, i.e. to your audience.
- Let them know what you want from them or how they can engage with your campaign.
- It can be simple. Every reel can have a similar call to action. People forget easily with the amount of content we consume every day.
- At least on Instagram: Use no more than three hashtags to get more interactions.

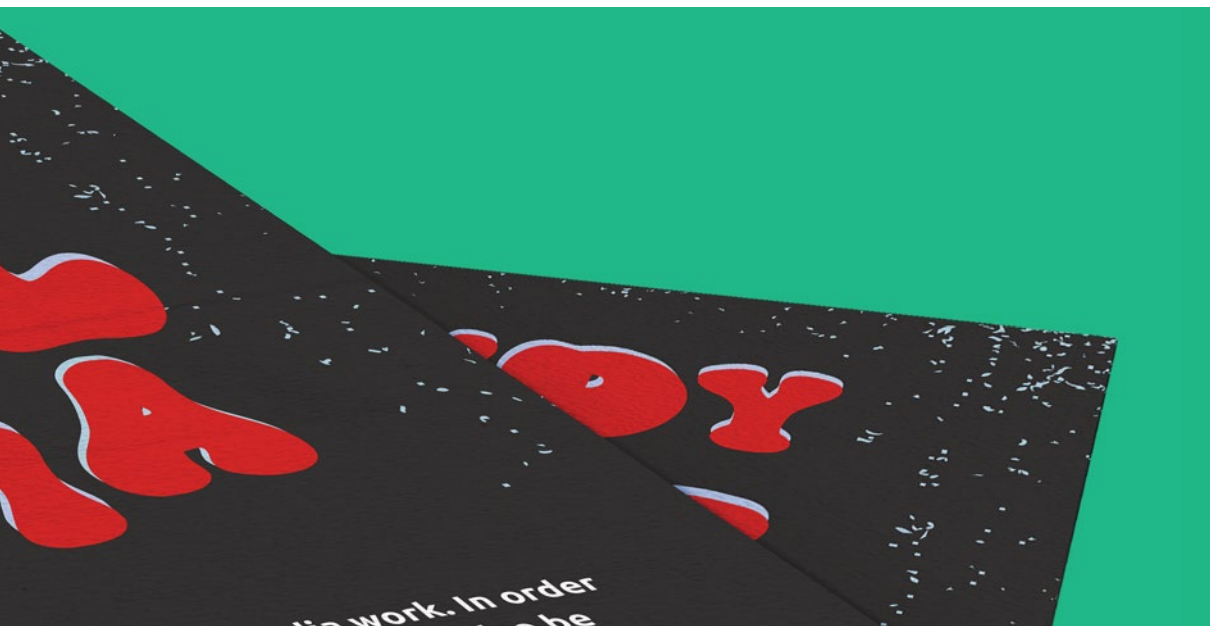
Accessibility:

- Create subtitles for your reel. By now, there are many programs to help you add them. This makes it easier for people to follow your content.
- Use simple language. At the same time, it's nice to also include translations. Depending on your target group, there can be a need for different languages.
- On most social media platforms, you can include a picture or video description. It's a bit of extra work but very easily added.

Are you looking for further tips and information about social media?

More info under "Occupy Social Media".²

2. See "Occupy Social Media" in Linktree (p.157)





Break Isolation

**Socializing Everyday Struggles
& Building Political Collectives**

Mouna Maaroufi
Helge Schwiertz

ECSEuro Research Team
Berlin & Hamburg

The society we live in and the multiple crises of recent years make people feel overwhelmed and isolated. Yet these grievances can also be a lever for collective organizing. We reflect on how political initiatives based in urban communities and neighborhoods across Europe work to empower folks and break isolation under these circumstances. Attempts to de-privatize everyday problems and “socialize” them are key to this endeavor.

Politics Rooted in Everyday Struggles

Everyday struggles have long been recognized as an important component or, as James C. Scott said, “the elementary — in the sense of foundational form — of politics” (Scott 1990, 201). Especially in a context of heightened repression and weakened social ties, they are needed not only for getting by on a daily basis, they are also crucial to enable and underpin diverse forms of political organizing. Studying the work of migrant, care work and housing groups in different European cities¹, we recognized an acute awareness for politics rooted in diverse everyday struggles and attempts to make them a cornerstone of organizing.

This is to be understood against the background of decades of neoliberal austerity politics that have privatized and neglected social infrastructures and considered the resulting social grievances and inequalities an individual responsibility. These politics and discourses that deny the structural origins of social problems and increasingly fragmented living conditions have contributed to an intensification of social divisions and isolation.

Organizing themselves, migrants, tenants, care workers, and other precarious groups engage in everyday struggles and mutual support. We refer to these processes as “socialization”: problems that are usually considered as individual are thereby rendered as social problems that require societal solutions. To sustain their organizing and to form collective political subjectivities and commons in these different fields, most groups build their own social spaces and infrastructures “from below”. Broadly speaking, we see “socialization” as a challenge to neoliberal privatizations, individuation and its mantra of “self- responsibility”: as a way to “break isolation”, to quote a slogan from the refugee protest movement².

1. As part of the research project “Enacting Citizenship and Solidarity in Europe ‘from below’”, 2022-2025.

2. See Link Reference 1 in Linktree (p.157); see also the Break Isolation Group, self-organized by refugee women as part of International Women* Space

Socialization in the Sectors of Housing and Health: Challenging Private Property

The term “socialization” is widely discussed as a political approach in struggles around housing, health care, transportation and climate justice³. It poses a challenge to dominant conceptions of private property. The solution is seen not necessarily in reinstalling public sectors of national welfare states, but in a process of democratic self-management. In this sense, recent movements in Germany are calling for the expropriation of housing companies or a re-municipalisation of hospitals⁴. In such socialized infrastructures, the provision of services ought to be needs-centered rather than profit-oriented, as well as more equal, participatory, and sustainable.

Socialization of the Everyday in Communities: De-Privatizing Social Problems

We suggest expanding this understanding of de-privatization and collectivization beyond larger social infrastructures and toward the multiple day-to-day problems and practices of precaritized subjects. In this sense, socialization must not always be conceived as an alternative form of large-scale collective ownership. Instead, it can consist in collectivizing social problems, spaces, and resources on a small scale — as conventionally done in nuclear families. In practice, such transformations are already pursued in multiple ways by various neighborhood organizations, collective spaces, community kitchens or health care centers. They seek to re-connect individualized problems and link them to a common societal context, to share resources in a more equal and needs-based manner, and to provide collective and non-commodified spaces and services. Thereby, they provide concrete socialized solutions for each other in the form of autonomous commons, social infrastructures, and political struggles rooted in the daily life. Their everyday activities convey that to realize structural change, people organize and struggle collectively in communities, cities, and neighborhoods and do so locally as well as translocally. We see such collective processes and prefigurations in the form of commoning as part of a larger societal movement toward socialization.

Everyday Practices of Socialization in Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg

To clarify this point, let us now zoom in to the neighborhood of Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg and its infrastructures of solidarity. In this context, the groups “WomeN IN Action” (NINA) and Wilhelmsburg Solidarisch (WISO) have something in common, despite

3. See Link Reference 2 in Linktree (p.157)

4. See Link Reference 3 in Linktree (p.157)

their quite different constituents. Both groups engage in micro-practices of socialization: they depart from their members' everyday problems in their organizing and seek to provide a collective and empowering context to address, improve, and politicize their situation. While WISO's members are affected by a variety of problems due to their work, housing, or migration status, NINA focuses on the manifold problems imposed on refugee women. By regularly sharing and discussing their personal problems, the shared nature of their grievances becomes unmistakable: this can lead to a feeling of being overwhelmed and powerless, but also to a process that systematically makes social contexts such as the arbitrariness of the authorities and class differences visible, so that a socialization of problems beyond individual cases occurs.

It is WISO's aim to build an infrastructure of solidarity in the neighborhood, and to reach it they invite people to weekly office days, where participants can bring their paperwork, for example from the unemployment office (JobCenter), immigration authorities or landlords [see Simon's contribution on WISO]. Moreover, every second week, in a co-counseling setting participants can share their social problems, experiences and ideas with one another, and thereby offer mutual support. This way of socializing everyday problems can go a long way in facing societal crises and divisions in a collective and political manner, as one of their regular participants argues:

"For me, such a solidarity network is a form of preventative anti-fascism. I believe that when people are left alone with their social problems, they also desolidarize themselves and this loss of humanity, so to speak, manifests itself in racist behavior and other forms of behavior that lack solidarity. I would like to live in a community where people show solidarity with each other and where a politicization can also take place in addition to a view of conflict situations not only as something that happens to me quasi by fate, but that also has its causes. And these causes are rooted in the existing power relations: that one should be put and kept in a position of powerlessness by a capitalist system. And then, as a utopian perspective, to rebel against the conditions in this collective" (Interview Leon 2023).

For NINA, organizing on the basis of their day-to-day struggles means first and foremost to enable and empower refugee women to get together and support each other. They make this possible by providing childcare and translations at their meetings and by creating a comfortable context — for example by cooking together. Thereby, they create an emotional context and connections described as "a very close relationship" by Jule or even as a "family" by Amina, who describes their approach as follows:

“Every woman can help herself. Here, when they come, sometimes they don’t know who we are, what we are doing... Like some of them they think only they come when they need something [...], like someone is looking for a flat. But our idea is not that. We need to be stronger, you know. In this world, if you don’t fight yourself, no one can help you. [...] When we are refugees, we have a lot of problems and that’s why for me it’s important how we grow, how we learn and how we understand all this system. And the important thing is how we help each other.” (Interview Amina 2023)

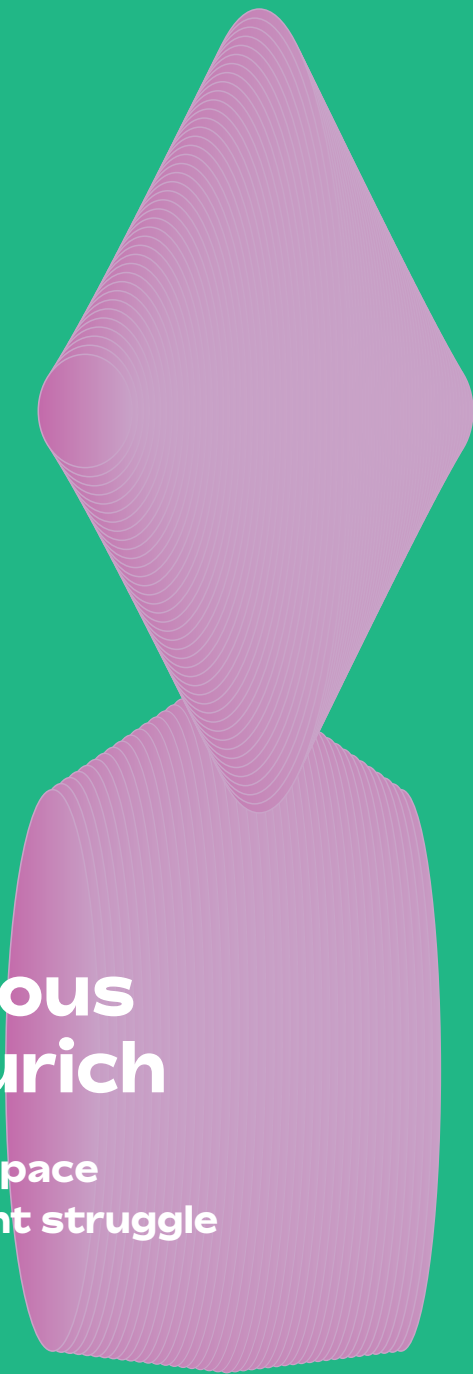
Their struggles against a confining Lager (refugee accommodation) regime also translate to broader societal questions and struggles, as they do not only claim the abolition of Lagers but demand “housing for all” in their public protests, such as in front of the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing in Wilhelmsburg in August 2023. Besides finding individual and collective solutions, both groups stage public actions and protests demanding structural and societal solutions for the issues that they face. In this way, they carry their demands — as well as their solutions based on mutual support and solidarity — to the streets and squares of their neighborhood.

They frequently do so in collaboration with one another or in translocal networks. WISO is part of a network of neighborhood initiatives that is expanding the meaning and scope of such organizations toward long-term and stable infrastructures of solidarity, such as neighborhood unions. NINA is well-connected within the active anti-racist and feminist scene across Germany composed of groups such as Women in Exile and International Women* Space, who are active in Berlin and Brandenburg [see Lucy’s contribution on IW*S]. They most recently came together to unite their struggles against the newly re-introduced payment card for asylum seekers (Bezahlkarte), which doesn’t only restrict their autonomy and possibilities in everyday life, but also points to a broader trend toward an increased confinement, exclusion and the corresponding stigmatization and racialization of refugees. Making these politically inflicted everyday difficulties and societal divisions visible contributes to a deprivatization of social problems and can set the ground for coming up with real solutions for social questions that concern all — such as socialization.

Some Conclusions

In summary, we have presented different forms of collective organizing grounded in the everyday. We emphasized a common focus on socializing solutions which may lie not only in larger campaigns, but also in community and neighborhood-based forms of organizing, commoning of social spaces and relations, as well as de-privatization and

socialization of infrastructures, resources, and services. From a broader perspective, this politics rooted in the everyday can counteract the increasingly regressive societal and political tendencies and be part of a preventive anti-fascism. Furthermore, it may lay the ground for more fundamental structural transformations such as an expropriation of privately-owned and profit-oriented social infrastructures and their socialization. We consider socialization an important vision for the future in order for the organization of our everyday lives to stop being conditioned by or made complicit with the deprivations, destructions and divisions produced by racial capitalism and its “interlocking systems of domination” (bell hooks).



Autonomous School Zurich

**An example of a space
of ongoing migrant struggle**

Claudia Wilopo

Autonomous School Zurich
Zurich

What Factors Contribute to a Migration Movement's Longevity and Long-Term Survival?

The Autonomous School Zurich (short: ASZ) is an antiracist project, space and movement that fights for the right to self-determination and education for all, regardless of residence status. It has survived for over 16 years in various forms and spaces. Compared to many other migration movements and projects, the ASZ has not only endured periods of precarity, state oppression and internal political conflicts, but also remained a pivotal, influential and critical force in shaping the lives of migrants, migrant movements, as well as other social movements in the city of Zurich and the German part of Switzerland.

In this text, I will briefly introduce the activities of the ASZ and show the importance of having a physical space for diverse activities, members and their different interests and needs. I will show that having an open, radical, and as pragmatic approach that operates between necessary charitable work and grassroots activism, is why the ASZ has survived for so many years. The approaches of the ASZ are food for thought for others organizing alongside a diverse and legally precarious group of people with different residence statuses¹.

What is the ASZ?

The ASZ is an association consisting of people with different residence statuses. Its main aim is to fight against racism and injustice concerning migrants. Its key activity is to organize a non-hierarchical and collectively governed school that is independent from the state.

Over the holiday season in 2008, the so-called "right-to-stay" collective (Bleiberecht-Kollektiv) in Zurich, consisting of squatters, migrant-rights activists and (illegalized) migrants, occupied a church to protest the social isolation and exclusion of illegalized migrants from having access to education, work and social space². They criticized the restrictive education and migration system, especially the 2009 asylum reforms, in which rejected asylum seekers were denied financial aid and language courses available to migrants with residence status.

The ASZ was eventually founded in the same year in an occupied building as a demand for an autonomous social and educational space. The school's status was precarious for years, during which they had to relocate and squat more than 12

1. All images are taken and created by the multimedia artist and member of the ASZ, Emilio Nasser. The images are part of the project called "Shipwreck of Dreams", which was exhibited at different places such as the Photoforum Pasquart in Bienne. It explores themes of belonging, resilience and the universal quest for home. This is an example of the different projects that are created by and with members of the ASZ. No faces of the people are visible for reasons of anonymity.



different buildings until 2015. Still local support steadily grew. The movement was occupying temporary spaces and financially supporting illegalized migrants to attend courses, for example, by paying for public transport tickets.

Among the ways the movement supported illegalized migrants was to purchase public transport tickets for them. This continues to be an important form of assistance because the camps (officially called departure center, where many (illegalized) migrants are forced to stay overnight), are located outside the city. The CHF 60 [EUR 64] emergency financial aid they receive weekly from the state is not enough to cover the costs of food, toiletries and other basic amenities. Through connecting to the ASZ community and learning the local language, illegalized migrants can increase their chances to apply for the hardship appeal (Härtefallgesuch). This appeal grants a temporary residence permit to illegalized people for humanitarian reasons under certain conditions, two of which are to pass a German language test and provide proof of social contacts.

Since 2015, the ASZ rents space in a temporary-use municipal building, serving more than 500 people weekly. The German language classes, ranging from literacy to conversation courses, aim to empower individuals to engage fully in society by knowing about their rights, communicating their needs and opinions, and discovering how they can transform the world. This approach is inspired by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's work on the "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", who wrote that "there's no such thing as neutral education. Education either functions as an instrument to bring about conformity or freedom"³. For the school, this means education is seen as a learning process for everyone involved. Therefore, teaching language courses is referred to as "moderating" classes. Instead of using the terms "teaching" and

2. A church called Predigerkirche located in the city of Zurich was occupied. The squatters demanded a humane and accessible implementation of the newly established hardship clause that was supposed to make it easier for illegalized migrants (German: Sans-Papiers), despite having their asylum claim rejected, to make a case for personal hardship due to exceptional personal humanitarian circumstances to remain in a country.



“teacher”, the terms “moderating” and “moderators” are used to highlight the intention that “teachers” are moderating and co-sharing the classroom responsibilities with the people who are developing their language skills. It implies that everyone can learn from each other and share knowledge and skills with their peers⁴.

In practice, this also means that everyone is in charge of keeping the school spaces clean, tidy and ensuring that people feel welcome, respected and comfortable. Everyone is encouraged, but not mandated, to participate in the monthly general assembly and social or political activities, and join one of the many working groups. In addition to the education working group, others existing working groups include the women’s group, the school’s newspaper, politics (called Tiktak), finances, social life, sports, childcare and gardening. These may change based on the involvement of new members. Important decisions are made at the general assembly where one representative of every working group is present. Discussions involve, for example, planning political actions, giving approvals for public statements and discussing internal processes, politics and teaching styles.

Continuous Struggles for a Space: Activities, Diversity, Network and Finances

The ASZ was initially created to offer German language courses and provide a space to fight for education for all, in which (illegalized) migrant activist-volunteers could meet, learn and organize with predominantly white, Swiss activist-volunteers⁵. Its precarious squatting history is a reminder of the importance of having a permanent and easily accessible space⁶. I believe that the ongoing efforts to obtain, maintain, and organize a space have played a key role in the longevity of the ASZ.

3. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970 p. 19

4. *This approach is common in other autonomous schools, such as in Denk:mal in Bern or maiz in Linz (AT). These groups all have collaborated in exchanges and joint actions and protests.*

There are four reasons why I think having a space is crucial for a migration project involving illegalized migrants. First, the ASZ offers a variety of activities and seven rooms for different needs. In addition to three classrooms, the space consists of a central office, a kitchen, a childcare room, a women*’s room and a school garden. These rooms allow for the accommodation of different people. For example, without the childcare room and its activist-volunteers, fewer women and people with care responsibilities could attend classes and events at the school. The café is another important space, where people hang out, have access to free Wi-Fi, affordable food and drinks and meet their friends. This is particularly helpful for many financially precarious and socially isolated people, especially illegalized people who face deportation.

The language courses attract a variety of people, such as, a Middle Eastern refugee who identifies as a feminist, an East African illegalized activist, a Southeast Asian mother married to a Swiss resident or a South American artist. All these individuals attending German classes find themselves in a space that recognizes their different struggles, challenges and identities as migrants. By acknowledging the intricacies, complexities and diversity of migration experiences, the ASZ hosts a broad range of individuals with various identities, ages and backgrounds.

Having a place where people can hang out and spend their daily lives together, without the need to consume or actively participate, helps (illegalized) migrants become familiar with the politics of the school, the activities of the ASZ and services in the city of Zurich at their own pace and on their own terms.

Second, the availability of various rooms and the diversity of courses offered open the ASZ to different people and projects. Besides different levels of German, the language courses that are offered are Arabic, English, French, Mandarin, and Spanish. There are also art, computer literacy, dance, math, psychology and yoga classes. The availability of these courses varies based on the individuals who are currently involved in the school and their capacity. This means that there are often new people and activities.

However, the ASZ’s backbone is the mix of different individuals who have been involved for a long time in the migrants’ rights movement. These people who consider themselves activists, migrants, feminists, students, teachers, pastors, academics, anarchists, humanitarians, liberals, artists, pensioners and more. Many do not share the same religion, lifestyle, class, political views or language, but they have all agreed

5. *I use the term activist-volunteers to emphasize that the members of the ASZ are both volunteers and activists who spend energy, time and often also their money at the ASZ. I use the term to show how, within the overlapping activist fields of migration and education, there is also a charitable element. This often involves activities such as volunteer educational, social and legal work that the state should cover.*

on the ASZ's shared principles as part of "a dignified life for all":



Emancipation instead of integration. Living instead of talking⁷. Education for self-determination. Self-organized, grassroots-based and participatory practices⁸.

Thus, the balance between the school's accessibility, diversity of activities and radical political positioning makes the ASZ welcoming to the involvement of new people who are needed to keep the project alive. This mix of new members with fresh energy and old members with historical knowledge is especially important for a movement to survive.

The third factor of the ASZ's success is its wide support network, often formed through deep friendships. These relationships are nurtured by social events such as the weekly ASZ dinners, political activities and hangouts. The large community of former and current members of the ASZ not only actively supports the school's work, but also helps with fundraising events and political campaigns that the ASZ co-organizes with other groups, such as the yearly "run against racism" that happens in Zurich or national migrants' rights demonstrations⁹.

Many members of the ASZ are professionals with skills and connections that are useful for the space and the movement. They are carpenters and plumbers who assist with repairs, as well as graphic designers, photographers, academics and authors who dedicate their time to editing and publishing the school's annual newspaper called *Papierlosenzeitung* (German: "Paper of the Paperless"), sending out fundraising

6. Accessibility here refers to both the central physical location near the main train station in Zurich as well as the barrier-free access to all rooms but one.

7. This means sharing and creating a non-violent space for community and knowledge exchange, fostering self-empowerment, creativity, and a social ideal of respect, free from racism, sexism, discrimination, and competition (ASZ, 2016).

emails, annual reports and newsletters to donors and supporters, and drafting statements to respond to unfolding political events. Members are also therapists, social workers, lawyers, NGO workers and politicians who know what support state institutions can offer for illegalized migrants and where they fall short. Additionally, the large network of lawyers and NGOs assist illegalized members with their asylum process and their access to free services such as medical aid. These connections are essential when migrants rights are being dismantled, border controls are increasing and the right to protest is threatened.

Fourth, the ASZ is located in one of the top five richest cities in the world and currently ruled by a center-left¹⁰ majority. These conditions make it possible for the ASZ to receive regular financial support from many local donors who give money every month. Such donations are crucial to support the school's infrastructure and activities. They also cover the rent for the temporary-use building.

The privileged finances of the ASZ allow the school to have two part-time paid office staff positions. Together with office volunteers, they are the first point of contact for members. Having two people managing tasks such as organizing general assemblies, giving introductions to new members and interested activist-volunteers, offering tours to visiting groups, answering emails and responding to questions from members and requests from media is crucial for the running of the school. It reduces the work of permanent activist-volunteers. Thus, the social, political, and financial web of connections and support is another vital point that contributes to the school's longevity and survival.

Radical and Pragmatic: A Continuous Struggle

The ASZ is not without challenges. Like other movements, the school has gone through many struggles, including threats of eviction and the arrests, deportations and deaths of its members. Issues such as sexism, racism and violence have led to the (temporary) exclusion of members.

Within the ASZ there are different positionalities, identities and needs, and many discussions have not been resolved. Differing opinions still exist on whether to expand German courses or focus more intensively on grassroots political actions. There are reoccurring debates about the reproduction of white paternalism and whether

8. *The ASZ's position paper opposes existing political, social, and economic power structures, critically challenging the concept of integration, purely humanitarian projects, and a homogenizing and exoticizing form of multiculturalism. As a signatory of the Charta of Lampedusa for Dignified Human Mobility and Territorial Solidarity, written in 2014, the ASZ joins many civil society organizations, local authorities, and citizens, who came together to respond to and openly criticizes the growing humanitarian and border crisis.*

discussions on these topics take time and energy away from the political work of preventing the deportation, poverty and homelessness of migrants¹¹. Although there are continuing struggles, ASZ members meet still manage to meet each other in their discussions. Enduring such difficult situations and conflicts might be the key to a long and sustainable movement.

The ASZ survives because its members are aware that a degree of pragmatism and continuous discussions are needed to keep up the struggle for a more open society. The ASZ community recognizes how crucial it is to develop social connections, everyday solidarity and tactics for survival within the system and political strategies of radical structural change.

9. *The “run against racism” is a yearly event that happens in Zurich where runners can raise money for different antiracist projects, including the ASZ. The event also invites different speakers and informs about the situation on the European borders and racist incidents in Europe. It is supported by various activist groups, NGOs, unions, and politicians (see also: <https://www.laufgegenrassismus.ch/warum>)*
10. *The social democrats (SP) held a majority in the municipal council of Zurich. The city council has a majority of social democrats, the green party of Switzerland (GPS) and the alternative list (AL). However, the second biggest party is the economic liberal party (FDP).*
11. *This refers to a mindset or practices where white citizens of the so-called dominant society assume the role of rescuing or “saving” marginalized non-citizen migrants from their oppressed situations. Such behavior is criticized as approaching them as helpless people who are not capable of agency. The “helping” person becomes the focus and not the marginalized individual themselves.*



Building Sustainable & Resilient Collectives

**An Empowerment Puzzle
for Self-Organization**

Marie
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Atelier Populaire d'Urbanisme du Vieux Lille & Mietenplenum Bern
Lille & Bern

Bio Kusi: Politicized in degrowth and anti-neoliberal globalisation movement, a urban fallow in my neighbourhood in Bern (Switzerland) brings questions of urban transitions to me. After my studies in social-cultural animation, I work now as a neighbourhood socialworker. Here I'm confronted with renewings of the City and gentrification. That motivated me to be part of the activist group *Mietenplenum* (German: rent plenary), where we try to build a bottom-up movement around housing questions, focusing that to live in the city isn't becoming a privilege just of the well-situated...

Bio Marie: Currently the coordinator of *APU du Vieux-Lille*, a grassroot organization working in Lille (France) alongside the poorly-housed and people threatened to be evicted from their homes, I first experienced the strength of community-based organizing and popular education while working in a neighborhood housing committee in Montreal (Quebec). I'm interested in discussing community organizing at large, and more specifically the place of the "first concerned" — people directly affected by injustice and those who come from marginalized communities — within our organisations.

Introduction and Description

While campaigning and fighting for more social justice, we are often confronted with internal conflicts and the challenge to ensure recruitment and a lasting commitment of the members of our organizations. Not being able to deal with these challenges may weaken our ability to get stronger, or even survive as a collective, and ultimately prevent us from enacting change at any level.

This contribution is thus an invitation to reflect on how we (self-)organize, from the preparation of our meetings to the place given to our community, activists and first-concerned people within our groups, as well as our decision and conflict-management processes. How do we make sure that our way of organizing enables us to remain strong and rooted while campaigning at a local, national or even transnational level?

The following content is a "mélange" of the self-organizing workshop held at Transnational Winter Academy in November 2024, supplemented and enriched with some content that seems important for us. Check also the links we added. During the workshop, two main challenges were identified by the participants: 1. Handling internal conflicts and 2. Securing organizational/movement sustainability.

Here are some of the answers to these challenges, the first pieces of the puzzle we

wanted to share with you, while looking forward to discovering and putting others together.

A. Common base: To Develop Common Attitudes & Goals is Crucial

If we want to achieve something together, we need to be able to gather around common values, visions and goals and regularly review and validate them.

- What effect do you want to create?
- What is your task? Do you want to listen or help, do you want to raise awareness or provoke, do you want to enable, activate, mobilize?
- How big is your range of action: one street, one neighborhood, the whole city, the whole world?
- How much could you actually achieve? How many personal and financial resources are available? How much resistance do you expect?

Also, in order to build a sense of belonging to a group, making space for joyful, fun activities is powerful. The focus is on community spirit and getting to know each other on a personal level, and serious work is deliberately interrupted. If you achieve a goal, celebrate it!¹⁻⁴

B. Tools to Prevent & Handle Conflicts: Recognize Differences, But Don't Let Divide

It is crucial to develop a “feedback and dispute” culture and process. Different tools may help with appreciative communication and conflict transformation: from hand signals over non-violent communication to the identification of a “care team” — responsible for welcoming uneasiness and ensuring compliance with the frame we defined together to build the safest environment possible —, but also resorting to external mediators/facilitators or experimenting forms of transformative justice.

However, as the author Starhawk puts it, “you may develop communication skills and be well-versed in conflict transformation tools, but certain people behave in ways that make all our efforts at constructive critique and clear communication seem futile”. How to deal with inability to accept feedback or admitting mistakes, for example? Starhawk invites us to establish a group culture where feedback is understood to be a gift, not an attack; where we are encouraged to face conflicts directly, and not gossip about them. Also, having people of diverse cultural backgrounds may offer a diversity of

1. See Link Reference A.1. in Linktree (p.157)

2. See Link Reference A.2. in Linktree (p.157)

3. See Link Reference A.3. in Linktree (p.157)

4. See Link Reference A.4. in Linktree (p.157) - (German)

perspectives and enlarge our responses when conflicts arise.^{5,7}

On dealing with “especially challenging behaviors” within our groups.⁸

C. Transparent (Power) Structures: How We Organize Ourselves Is How We Change the World

It happens so quickly and without any malicious intent that some people are more active than others or have more interest, talent, experience, resources or contacts. This then creates informal hierarchies.

To handle them, it can be helpful to decide together and disclose who gets decision-making and creative power (for what, for how long). If people in their specific role know where their creative scope is and where it ends, this can strengthen you as a collective. On the one hand, you legitimize individual people to fully commit to a task and give them the necessary scope for action. On the other hand, you get the opportunity to say “stop” as a collective if individuals dominate too much or interfere in areas that should be the responsibility of other people. Decide how you want to make decisions, for example through votation, consensus or consent.⁹

D. Build Up Competencies Together: Do What You Like & Try Out What You Are Interested in

Who has which skills in your team? It is worth talking about who in the collective is actually particularly suited to which tasks and who is interested to try out something new. Define the tasks you need and the roles behind these tasks. Do as much as possible in pairs at least. Try to mix long-standing members and newcomers. Divide your plans into smaller task packages and distribute them. Basic functioning of meetings and documentation has to be well-ensured:

Meetings:

1. Prepare meetings
2. Invitation
3. Define the roles you need, for example: moderator, timekeeper, recorder, motivator, awareness responsible
4. Define what group, how big, which members?
5. What are the goals of the meeting?
6. Define meeting agenda (information, discussions, decisions)

5. See Link Reference B.1. in Linktree (p.157)

6. See Link Reference B.2. in Linktree (p.157)

7. See Link Reference B.3. in Linktree (p.157)

8. See Link Reference B.4. in Linktree (p.157)

9. See also: <https://www.sociocracyforall.org/consent-decision-making/>

7. Prioritize the agenda
8. Time/space frame: where and how long?

Documentation: If anything should come out of a meeting, it's important that there is a to-do-list. Where are documents stored? When and how are they updated?

Having a shared calendar helps to have the overview of what comes next.^{10,13}

E. Accessibility to the Group Open for Whom & How

Making sure that you are open and welcoming for different people.

Have you ever thought about how open you are to new people? Collectives do not necessarily have to be accessible to everyone (that is actually not possible). But we have noticed that the clearer we are about who we want to be accessible for, the more actively we can act accordingly. To find out how and to whom you want to be accessible, ask yourself the following questions:

- Who should definitely be represented in your collective?
- When would you be surprised or dissatisfied if XY was missing or didn't dare to join you?
- Who do you accept in your collective but don't actively strive for?
- Who do you not want in your collective?
- How big should and can your group be?

Do you want to keep the hurdle for newcomers as low as possible — but without a lot of effort on your part? A tried and tested solution is to set up a buddy system, a mentoring program where you build up tandems between a long-time member of the group and a newcomer.

Conclusion

Trying to put together some pieces of what could be more sustainable and resilient forms of activism, we measure the extent of the practice changes we may need to achieve — from decision-making to communication, from conflict transformation to welcoming new members while keeping long-standing ones, from valuing diversity to building a system of common core-values, and so on.

In our movements, infightings and internal organizational problems are often shameful

aspects we would rather hide or not think too much about. Our bet here is that translocal alliances and movements also get stronger when they take these aspects seriously, sharing knowledge and tools on these specific topics and building from each others' experiences. While acknowledging that there is no universal "magic recipe" to internal crises and challenges within our movements and organizations, we believe that sharing from our different national and cultural backgrounds can broaden the scope of and enrich our responses to these challenges.



Further Reads and Reference Links

Scan the QR code above to find the collection of all links referenced in different articles, as well as other links of interest, in case you'd like to read more about the Enacting Citizenship and Solidarity in Europe research project and its results.

The handbook you hold in your hands is one of the results of the Transurban Solidarity Lab, a collaborative learning programme that between 2024 and 2025 brought together 40+ activists, workers and organisers active in the fields of care work, migrants' rights and housing struggles based in 15 different cities across Europe, to discuss, reflect and envision how best to harness the power of translocal and transversal networks and alliances. Assembling a collection of 20 contributions produced by the programme participants, it seeks to provide a variety of different answers to the overarching questions at the heart of the Transurban Solidarity Lab: what can similar initiatives based in different localities learn from one another? And, how can other struggles be connected to the one we organize around? All of them offering a different approach to this theme, drawing from diverse perspectives, lived experiences and skills from the authors, they all together make the whole of this collectively crafted resource containing insights, examples, methodologies and strategies in political organizing shared by the activists, organizers and workers who took part in this project, to inspire others alike.

