



I am (the art of) Europe 20th October 2016

Speakers: Marjo Van Schaik (Cultural Strategic Advisor and Project Manager of Europe by People, The Netherlands), Juliane Männel (Production Manager at Home Visit Europe, Germany), Kathleen Weyts (Project Coordinator of Imagine Europe – In Search of New Narratives, Belgium)

Moderator: Jorma Sarv (Head of International Cultural Projects of the Estonian 100 Jubilee Year and Estonian EU Presidency Team)

This workshop presented innovative and untraditional examples of European art and culture projects. Speakers showed that, in addition to the Europe 'where laws are made', there is also the Europe of culture, creating inspiration and unlocking talent and innovation with a wider impact on society and the economy.

The first speaker, **Marjo Van Schaik**, emphasised that the power of a nation lies in the ability to think innovatively, be creative, work together and connect. Led by this idea, the team responsible for cultural programming during the Dutch Presidency of the EU decided to gather a new generation of artists and designers – people who will actually create Europe in the coming years. They wanted to demonstrate the innovation potential of the Netherlands through a new, original approach, staying away from the usual exhibition format. In the preparation phase, the team faced a number of political hurdles and also found that residents were opposed to spending too much money on the project, as culture was considered too elitist by many.

Though limited by budget, in the end the programme included people from a variety of countries, not only the Netherlands. They found that people were often enthusiastic at first, but that this would wane over time. The main project, Europe by People, looked at contemporary social issues through the lens of art and design, consisting of several parts, such as *The Wall*, *FabCity*, and *On Stage*. *The Wall* was an off- and online programme of art installations and performances, using a 450 metre brick wall which separated the politicians from the public during the Dutch Presidency of the EU as a means to actually enhance communication between those two groups. *FabCity* was a 'maker space' for urban innovators, and the others were different programmes of performances, art installations and exhibitions, while *On Stage* was a programme of performances, projects and exhibitions themed around priorities of the Dutch Presidency.

Juliane Männel was the second speaker, and she explained the 'Home Visit Europe' project, which was launched in 2015 in Berlin. It consists of theatre performances which are staged in private homes rather than actual theatres. Groups are composed of fifteen strangers who become part of the performance, interweaving personal stories with the political mechanism of Europe. Hosting a performance is open to anyone and the project travels through hundreds of homes, building a

network rather than growing from a centre. Participants discuss both private experiences connected to Europe and other issues linked to the EU, with the end goal that different people from different countries and backgrounds can meet and discuss together, learning from each other and discovering the unexpected.

During the discussion, Ms. Männel clarified that although they get a lot of requests from schools, it is not suited for people who already know each other. Tickets can be bought in the same way and for the same price as any other show. She also noted that the most important thing was to have people who were willing to host the performance in their home.

The final speaker was **Kathleen Weyts**, who is coordinating the 'Imagine Europe – In Search of New Narratives' and 'Europe Europe' projects for BOZAR in Brussels. She emphasised that Europe is not only about politics and the economy – it is also a spiritual home and a centre of the arts. Art is about communication; in fact art is communication as art has the power to communicate by itself.

The 'Imagine Europe – In Search of New Narratives' project gathers European artists, scientists and thinkers to present their vision of Europe's future. Debates, lectures and workshops focus on subjects such as migration, democracy and the power of stories. The aim is to present the main challenges that will affect the Europe of tomorrow. As this project started in the midst of the refugee crisis, there is a concern that most the projects would centre around this issue, but in fact this has not materialised. Ms. Weyts also highlighted that narratives presented were not stories to simplify things, but rather to teach us empathy.

The project invited students, artists and architects to make twelve labs in collaboration. The first narrative was 'No Conspiracy', referring to Europe's lack of conspiracy theories. This was followed by 'Next Generation, Please Fresh Ideas for Europe', 'Recyclable Refugee Camp Roofing', 'Brussels – Productive Capital of Europe', 'A New Design for the European Council', 'Designing Democracy', '#Revolution!', 'Europaplatz', 'From the East: Bordering to Fiction', 'Art Meets Science and Spirituality in a Changing Economy', 'Geographies of Change' and finally 'Statements for Europe'. The project also included a discussion room, where organisations were invited to use the space free of charge.

In concluding the session, all speakers expressed a desire to see art have a place at the table at the next EuroPCom.