

SPRING 2021

# Homeless in Europe

A Magazine by FEANTSA



FEANTSA



**THE ARTS & CULTURE:  
CREATING FORCES FOR  
SOCIAL CHANGE**

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For the last ten years, Europe has been the theatre of a social disaster, witnessing dramatic increases in housing exclusion and homelessness. Homelessness today affects all ages, all genders and all nationalities. Prolonged episodes of homelessness and the diversification of the profiles of those concerned reflect the dysfunctions inherent in our protection systems and housing markets. The pandemic has been accelerating the surge in people living in extreme poverty and dire living conditions.

In this context, people and support services are struggling to survive. Vital needs, such as access to accommodation, food and healthcare, are prioritized. But people living in poverty and experiencing exclusion often suffer from social isolation, poor physical and mental health, and a lack of autonomy: people with multiple needs should be supported through multiple solutions from the start.

Participation in cultural life and access to creation are fundamental rights, enshrined in several international and European courts, including the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), article 15, according to which “everyone must be able to

express themselves, create and distribute their works in the language of their choice”, and the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, article 5: “everyone must be able to participate in the cultural life of their choice and exercise its own cultural practices.”

Many projects fostering the access to art and creation for people in a situation of exclusion have been flourishing at local level across Europe for decades. Some of these projects are presented here, demonstrating that beyond representing a fundamental human right, arts and creativity can also promote well-being, strengthen social networks, challenge public perceptions, and empower people to have their voices heard. As aptly stated by Skåne Stadsmission, who developed The Creative Workshop in Sweden: “By participating in the work of the creative workshop, an opportunity arises to be acknowledged and appreciated as something other than a social problem, something that many of our participants are otherwise defined as.”

What is art? What is creativity? The definitions here are different from one article to another. Some projects aim to create social change,

# EDITORIAL



By **Chloé Serme-Morin**, project officer for FEANTSA and Fondation Abbé Pierre

improve employability, strengthen social inclusion, or build advocacy to change public perception around exclusion. Others are based on arts and creativity as ways to decompartmentalize approaches and support practices, to introduce horizontal modes of support, and to empower people by simply proving that they can be artists and creators.

Access to art and creation is not commonly a priority when it comes to building a plea for better consideration of the human rights of people experiencing exclusion or homelessness. However, arts and creativity have a real impact on one's recovery or inclusion process as well as on social and cultural structures. At European level, opportunities for

exchanging practices and building up successes from those kinds of projects are starting to appear: a European partnership between FEANTSA, Fondation Abbé Pierre and several structures presented in this edition of the magazine is currently under construction. Moreover, FEANTSA is now an official partner of the New European Bauhaus, a creative and interdisciplinary initiative driven by the European Commission aiming at "convening a space of encounter to design future ways of living, situated at the crossroads between art, culture, social inclusion, science and technology."

Let us come together, as Arts and Homelessness International invite us to do, "to use creativity to help each other thrive, not just survive."

“Access to art and creation is not commonly a priority when it comes to building a plea for better consideration of the human rights of people experiencing exclusion or homelessness. However, [they] have a real impact on one's recovery or inclusion process as well as on social and cultural structures.”



# THE RISE OF CREATIVITY IN THE HOMELESSNESS SECTOR:

IN DISCUSSION WITH MATT PEACOCK  
AND DAVID TOVEY OF ARTS &  
HOMELESSNESS INTERNATIONAL

The field of arts and homelessness has grown significantly over the last 20 years. From agencies running art projects in homeless services to stand-alone creative NGO's and charities, there is now a broad and varied landscape of arts programmes for people experiencing homelessness. Matt Peacock and David Tovey of *Arts & Homelessness International* discuss the reason for this rise, the value of the arts in this context and the importance of co-production in their own work.



By **Matt Peacock** and **David Tovey**, Arts & Homelessness International

## Matt:

The field of arts and homelessness has grown significantly over the last 20 years, since David and I began working in this sector. I remember in the '90s I only knew of a handful of projects such as **Cardboard Citizens** (UK) and the **Accueil Bonneau Choir** (Montreal) – now we have almost 500 projects in the global network.

Throughout Europe there are homeless agencies running arts projects integrated into services such as **Emmaüs Solidarité** – and stand-alone NGOs and charities from **Basket Beats** in Barcelona to **Shedia** in Athens, the Salzburg's **Apropos Choir** and **Som da Rua** in Porto. In the UK, there are well over 100 projects in the field from **Museum of Homelessness**, **Choir with No Name**, to homeless centres with arts programmes such as **Booth Centre** and **Crisis** and cultural spaces working regularly with homeless people from **Citizens Theatre in Glasgow** to **Manchester Museum** (who have an Artist in Residence with lived experience) and **Tate Modern**. There are projects exploring all artforms from film to poetry, opera to mosaics.

The reason for this rise in creative projects is partly due to a development and sophistication of homelessness support over the years from crisis management to strategies to empower people to move out of their situation. There has been a shift from the Maslovian idea of food and shelter first and education and culture later to a

more holistic approach of multiple needs requiring multiple solutions (typified by our **Jigsaw of Homeless Support**<sup>1</sup> which is now being embedded into local government homelessness strategies in UK and is an example of best practice at the UN).

Meanwhile, projects are also getting better at demonstrating how arts can provide tangible positive impacts. When I started as a support worker in a London night shelter, creativity was seen as a distraction, something to pass the time. Now through research from a number of NGOs, we can see evidence that creativity improves well-being, resilience, agency, knowledge and skills (Shaw, 2019<sup>2</sup>). Better evidence has increased funding from arts sources (certainly in the UK) which, in turn, has increased the number of projects.

Unexpectedly, the increase in creativity recently has had a lot to do with COVID. You might think that a global pandemic which has resulted in the closure of cultural spaces will have halted creativity in homelessness. But across history, when there is a crisis, activists roll up their sleeves and the world is full of arts activists. Also, it quickly became clear that people staying in hotels, emergency accommodation and on the streets were facing more isolation and poor mental health – so homeless services and local authorities have been turning to arts projects in this sector for help. The value of arts in community life has, I would argue, never been higher and it has resulted in a potential Golden Age of arts and social change.

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1 [The Jigsaw of Homeless Support](#), co-created with homeless people in Manchester, 2019

2 [A Literature Review of Arts and Homelessness](#), Shaw 2020

# “Art doesn’t necessarily provide homes, but it does help produce a route to one.”

## David:

The value of the arts generally has never been stronger. Because of the COVID pandemic – overnight it became as important as medication, helping with isolation, resilience, and mental health in lockdown. TV programmes have exploded onto our screens, making the arts accessible to as many as possible. But there are always parts of society that fall through those cracks. Homeless communities being one.

Some creative projects in homelessness started moving their work online and others began devising new postal projects to reach people in isolation who didn’t have internet access. This has grown to include face-to-face projects in parks and with residents in hotels. Here are a few examples in the UK:

- Accumulate sent 3,500 art packs out to hotels in London and beyond;
- A group in Coventry led by Underground Lights sent out [creative packs](#) and postcards for members of those groups plus people in temporary accommodation and Housing First (this has become a [global project](#));

- An embroidery project, [Here Comes the Sun](#) by art collective Arthur and Martha involved the Booth Centre in Manchester;
- An online opera was created by Streetwise Opera;
- AHI researched the role of creativity in homelessness during the pandemic, bringing together homeless people, support workers, artists, commissioners and academics who produced this [film](#), [report](#) and [online learning resource](#).

Even though COVID shut down most parts of the world, we found that it brought our international community closer together. Having to change our ways of working to an online format, gave us the opportunity to facilitate a new online space for the international arts and homelessness sector. We set up a Zoom space where we can all come together to talk about our projects, our work, our concerns, have some fun, do and see some creativity, and so much more. Within these Forums, the international community has forged many connections around the world, from Johannesburg, South Africa to Nashville, Tennessee. Every last Wednesday of the month at 10am and 5pm (GMT) [you too can come and join](#) the conversations and see and hear from some of the most inspiring projects and artists around the globe.

## **Matt:**

These monthly international Zoom 'Forums' that David runs are really beautiful events which show the importance of togetherness, sharing ideas and solidarity. The arts and homelessness sector is quite young compared with other sectors which use the arts for social change such as arts and health and arts and disability.

In any young sector, individuals and projects work hard to keep afloat and tend to do that in isolation. It was exciting when we started getting people together – there was so much common ground, overlapping successes and challenges which led to the transference of ideas and knowledge. People talked about their projects being like sticks which could be easily broken, but together, as a bundle of sticks, we were stronger.

During Rio 2016, we brought projects together from North and South America, Europe and Asia. One significant impact was that delegates from Manchester, UK were so inspired by the Brazilian movement of the streets (Movimento População da Rua) which is network of groups of homeless people throughout the country who lobby local government about homelessness legislation – that they brought it back to the UK. This became the Manchester Homelessness Charter, a mechanism of co-creation of homelessness services in Manchester with homeless people being involved from design to delivery. And this has now given rise to AHI's Civic Plan work in local authorities around UK embedding co-creation and arts into council homelessness strategies.

What we have seen countless times is that when you get brilliant people together (either face-to-face or digitally), brilliant things happen. And it has also shown us the incredible power of working in co-production with people who are or have been homeless. This runs counter to the historic ways of working where the people who held the power were mostly non-homeless people helping those who are homeless.

## **David:**

Co-production is at the heart of everything we do, with 50% of our staff and board people who are or have been homeless. This is very important to us because how can we know what homeless people need if we have not been in their situation? Co-production may feel like you're giving something up, e.g. a job position, but I disagree, you gain so much as an organisation when employing someone because of their lived experience. That, in the long run, has such a massive impact on your company. In a way it's like having a spy on the inside. Don't get me wrong, there are hurdles, and it can take a lot longer to get stuff done, but co-production creates a fairer and more equitable environment to work in. I would recommend trying it, what have you got to lose? Arts got me through my situation when I was homeless and a few years later, I am on government panels with ministers, advising them on policy. Surely everyone deserves that opportunity.

Those who find themselves homeless also deserve to have an opportunity within the cultural sector, we know arts and culture is a human right (Article 27 of the UN Charter), but so many times





# The value of arts in community life has never been higher and it has resulted in a potential Golden Age of arts and social change.”

homeless people are denied access to the arts. Obviously, this is something I'm extremely passionate about changing. Back in 2015 I first came across the work of AHI at City Hall in London. They had bought an arts and homelessness delegation from Brazil to London. After listening to one of the homeless delegates talk about how he had created a small music festival in São Paulo, I was so surprised that nothing existed in London. I then went about setting up a [homeless arts festival](#) to create more opportunities for artists who had found themselves homeless. This was done with no funding but just a desire to make change. It's been a massive success, with

shows and concerts in 3 cities across the UK and hundreds of artists worldwide showcasing their work. This is one of the impacts of AHI bringing people together from different countries and walks of life. Art doesn't necessarily provide homes, but it does help produce a route to one.

## **Matt:**

We are driven by a desire to help the arts and homelessness community connect and strengthen. Please join us – we run programmes for homeless artists, arts/homelessness projects, cultural spaces, homeless centres, and local authorities. This year we will start the first leadership programme for homeless people in the cultural sector. Let's come together to use creativity to help each other thrive, not just survive.

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Click [here](#) to join the network; visit [www.artshomelessint.com](http://www.artshomelessint.com) to find out about our work. You can email us at [matt@with-one-voice.com](mailto:matt@with-one-voice.com) and [david@with-one-voice.com](mailto:david@with-one-voice.com) and follow us on social media [@artshomelessint](#).

# UNTERDRUCK – KULTUR VON DER STRASSE:

## ARTS AND CREATIVITY AS SHARED PRAXIS TO COUNTERACT EXCLUSION

An interactive and immersive musical, in which a range of identities are up for grabs, is at the heart of Unterdruck's role in promoting participation and socio-cultural work, a role which also includes providing classic services such as social counselling and emergency care. In this article, Tanja Ehmann details the challenges and rewards of building bridges between homeless and activist communities and the benefits that creative projects can offer.



Gogo Trash and Theater Unterdruck performing on Mariannenplatz in Berlin - Kreuzberg during Vagabond Congress in August 2020

*A homeless person leaves Berlin in anger and goes into a forest during his wanderings. The area seems deserted. Tired and powerless, he lies down on the unpaved shoulder of a road and falls asleep. The vagabond stumbles upon him at dawn and invites him to share her life on the beach. Here, all who are on the move and wandering meet by chance and are happy to be here, no one has any longing for Berlin. The dancers arrive on the beach and impress the group. The dancers tell of the Vagabond Festival in Berlin. They find approval, only the homeless man wants to stay. Together they convince him and they all leave together. The actors mingle with the audience and watch the performance. They go on stage and dress up in front of the audience. All participants sing the farewell song together.*

The storyboard above is from a musical the theatre group Unterdruck - Kultur von der Straße e.V. (Under pressure - culture from the street), an association with a meeting point for homeless people, and an art collective called Czentrifuga in Berlin. The musical

is a collaboration between the theatre group and Gogotrash, the performance group from Czentrifuga developed for the Vagabond Congress 2020. The Vagabond Congress is a project and festival, financially supported by Aktion Mensch an association that supports initiatives who act as stakeholder representatives for marginalized inhabitants of the city and who aim to counteract exclusion and segregation. The aim of the project and of Unterdruck is to fight together against discrimination, isolation and exclusion in order to light up life on the street with constructive perspectives and create a space for solidarity, exchange and self-organisation. The project makes visible mobile forms of living in the city through artistic practices, appropriates a public space with those activities, and shares it with others. We started the project with regular meetings, examined homelessness from different perspectives and experiences, established ideas workshops, decided to collaborate on a Vagazine and produced "propaganda materials" such as stickers, posters, and postcards.

The Vagabond as an image of the mobile inhabitant who is a part of urban society helped to bring together those people who experience space and their habitat through movement, who cross the spaces of residence and create their own paths through space appropriation and constitution. Through mobile networking, we reached visitors of the homeless meeting point, people who care about those who have fallen out of the welfare system, and we cooperated with street artists and activists in the field of the right to the city. The participatory focus of the regularly



Reusing historical imagery and Zinken sign language for a two-colour Resoprint



published Vagazine, which artistically deals with topics related to homelessness and Vagabondage in pictures and text, served also as a mouthpiece for the Vagabond Congress 2020 campaign. The Congress itself collected, presented, and documented the activities during the project period of three years.

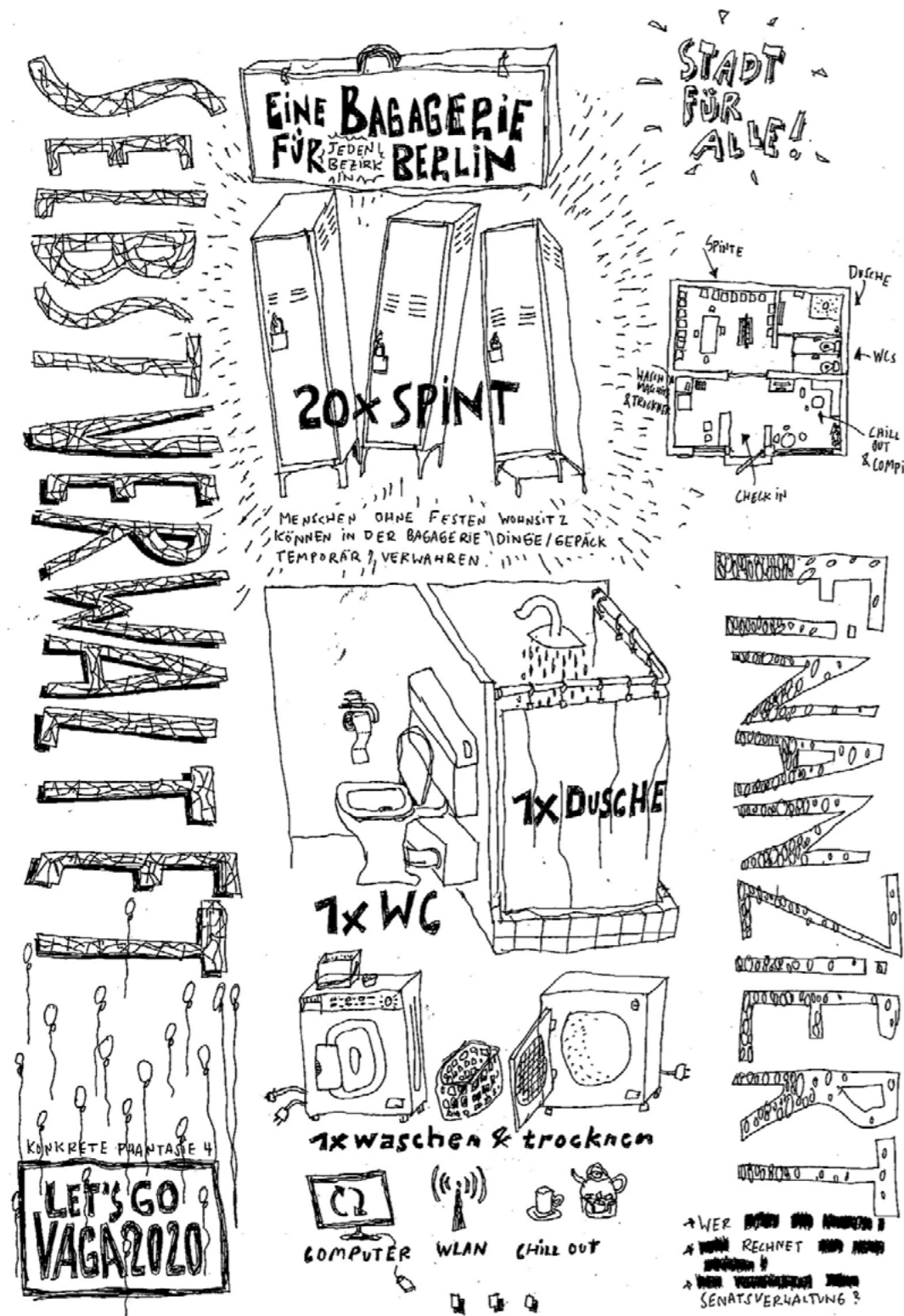
Through the Congress project we established a meeting and exchange place by and for people affected by exclusion and provided a stage for the artistic expression of their different daily lives and the politics of making demands on the welfare system. Furthermore, the Congress shows that it is possible to involve urban society through artistic practices at a public space and create moments containing complementary modes of recognition of the city's displaced inhabitants and hope for the redistribution of social capital.

The self-organization process - getting together, exchanging ideas, establishing demands and visibility by using artistic practices - was meant to bridge the gap between people who are forced to live on the streets and socio-cultural activists. It was not an easy task, especially because visitors of the meeting point of Unterdruck live a busy



Posters from and for the printing action week "Printers and Vagabonds unite"

Through the Congress project we established a meeting and exchange place by and for people affected by exclusion and provided a stage for the artistic expression of their different daily lives and the politics of making demands on the welfare system."



daily life, occupied with struggling to survive and facing stigmatisation, whereas most of the activists do not live in precarious conditions, are used to organizing themselves and to carrying on in the face of adversity. At the beginning of the project, we were enthusiastic about getting a lot of people who experience homelessness involved and were frustrated when we were confronted with mistrust and suspected of instrumentalising these people to achieve our goals. Fortunately, we could rely on the experiences of Unterdruck which has already been active for 30 years. Originating from a theatre play with homeless people, the focus of the Unterdruck is on participation and socio-cultural work, in addition to providing classic services such as social counselling and emergency care. Taking time, exchange of experiences, talking about one's own living environment, establishing a dialogue praxis and expressing it through artistic practices like collages and screen-printing workshops, writing poems, music making and theatre performances, motivated people to get involved. Some were only there for a short time, others for the whole project period. Overall, the joint work on the Vagabonds' Congress 2020, through artistic means, created space for participatory structures and supported self-efficacy, breaking up routines and encouraging self-determined belonging, which we see as an important precondition to fight for ones (human) rights.

Campaign for a Bagagerie like it exists in Marseille, we called it „Vagarie“

# SKÅNE STADSMISSION'S CREATIVE WORKSHOP: SEEING CONVERSATION AS A CREATIVE PROCESS

The Creative Workshop was borne out of an observed need among people who came to Café David; the need to express themselves, the need to come together, the need to converse. Here, Oskar Mörnerud, Johan Perna and Matilda Jägerdén consider, among other things, the presence of conversation in the creative process and how this has influenced their broad view of the creative process and its key role in building relationships.

By **Oskar Mörnerud, Johan Perna, Matilda Jägerdén**

*Translation Dennis Arndt*

## AN OPEN MEETING PLACE

Skåne Stadsmission is a non-profit organization that runs a meeting place called Café David for people living in social precariousness. Café David offers free breakfast and coffee, subsidized lunches, and a chance to shower and get clean clothes. Staff members are available for counselling and emotional support and work closely with the on-site counsellor and nurse. Collaboration with authorities and non-profit organisations is ongoing. Café David is the only place in the city of Malmö which is open 365 days a year for people struggling with homelessness, addiction and mental illness.

About 170 people come to Café David every day. Each participant has their own individual challenge which is why support needs to be tailored to the individuals' needs as much as possible.

*“Here I get breakfast every day and there is always someone who listens” - Stina*

Being welcome and part of a community is important for everyone and that is part of the reason why the work done at Café David revolves around creating dignified and meaningful connections between the visitors and the staff. The focus of the work is to build on peoples strenghts and one of the leading principles is “you can always have a second chance.”

## CREATIVE WORKSHOP - MEETING AND CREATING TOGETHER

Over the years, Café David has offered participants the opportunity to take part in various forms of activities and creative pursuits. The Creative Workshop developed because the staff saw a need among the participants who came to Café David to express their creativity. Many of them brought their own instruments, books, pens, brushes and paper, which were used in the Café. Initially, materials were purchased and used in the Café to paint, write and draw. As the need grew, the project needed more space and moved to a room in the basement where there was even space to make frames for finished pieces of art. After that, it wasn't long before the first exhibition.

Today, the Creative Workshop occupies an entire floor in the same building as the meeting place Café David. That house also holds the curator's office and the nurse's station. A few times a week a doctor and dentist also come to help the visitors at Café David. We see great value in having all these services under the same roof.

## THE NEED TO EXPRESS ONESELF

Conversations are at the heart of the work at Café David, that's where relationships are established and the wants and needs of our participants are identified. The entire approach is often highly pragmatic, with a strong focus on satisfying basic needs, and yet, in the midst of all this solution-based work, a conversation is always present.

*“In the conversations that arise, there is an opportunity for “the contributions of the speakers to merge into something entirely new. A new reality comes into being as we speak” which means that the conversation can lead to finding new ways forward, but also that the conversation can be seen as a creative process” (Engqvist 2013, 77).*

In fact, in the work at Café David a conversation is seen as a form of creative activity (a need to express oneself and find new ways), so one could say that the entire organization is essentially a creative project. It therefore seems quite natural that the creative workshop has now become a rather large part of the original organization.

*Based on this, we have a broad view of what creativity is. Sometimes a simple conversation can be a first creative activity that leads on to the creation of something new, sometimes it is writing a song, painting or looking for a job. In the workshop you can participate in ongoing communal projects or work on your own. The idea is to find what each individual wants to do, accommodate that idea as much as possible, and let it grow.*

The workshop has a number of rooms where you can paint, draw, print in different graphic techniques, sculpt, listen to music, use computers, sew and repair, read and write. There is also a music room where you can play music on electric guitar, electric bass, drums and piano.

In addition to participants being free to choose what they want to do, work is often done in a project format by exploring a theme. In workshops, everyone then works on the theme by trying out different techniques such as oil painting, acrylic painting, textile printing, watercolor, calligraphy, ink painting, collage, bookbinding, text, pattern sewing, different graphic techniques, and more. The result is usually presented in the form of an exhibition.

## EXHIBITIONS: TOGETHER YOU ARE NEVER ALONE

Quite recently, an exhibition was produced that was also turned into a book. The idea for the exhibition and the accompanying book emerged during the 2018 election year in Sweden. For the first time, people could submit early votes at Café David and we hosted a panel discussion with representatives of the different municipal parties. One of the most discussed topics at the Q&A session was housing policy, the reason being that a lot of the participants at Café David are homeless.

The planning of that project is a good example of how the creative process works in the Creative Workshop. The first idea was to build a movable exhibition in the form of a foldable wall filled with texts and pictures that could be displayed in different places in Malmö - a kind of wall magazine to express one's opinions on. During the discussions and conversations that followed in the workshop, the focus came to circle around what a home really is, and it was decided that that was a good theme to address on



Lars Fohrman participant in the creative workshop





The book *HOME?*

the folding wall. Then it also made sense to build the folding wall as a kind of apartment wall on which we could present the texts and pictures. The texts and images were then also turned into a book entitled "HOME?" and an exhibition was held at the Malmö City Hall and Malmö City Library.

Another project led to the formation of our music studio. Initially, the Café only had one acoustic guitar, but the participants expressed interest in playing other instruments as well, so a need for funding the cost of more instruments in order to start up a regular music activity were identified. We asked for donations of instruments and music equipment on Facebook which, together with the funds we received from other donors, led to the creation of a small music studio where it is possible to rehearse and record music. This studio is now a permanent part of the Creative Workshop. The project eventually culminated in a concert where participants performed on our new instruments.

“Here I get breakfast every day and there is always someone who listens”

Stina



The exhibition that followed was also a combined concert and art exhibition. The exhibition, which focused on the theme of recycling, included paintings and drawings as well as a large installation entitled "The Museum of Lost and Found Things". It consisted of "lost and found objects" presented on a 7-metre-long exhibition stand. The objects in the stand were accompanied by informative texts that provided a background of the history of the objects.

Currently, work is ongoing on a documentary exhibition titled "Together you are never alone." The idea behind this project was to give participants an opportunity to talk about their experiences during the pandemic and offer an opportunity for reflection, where the participant can describe their feelings and thoughts about how they are affected by and experience the situation, using text and paintings. The project takes place mainly in the Creative Workshop, but there is also the possibility to participate through a writing station in the Café, a way to make the project as inclusive as possible. The idea is to have a free "association wall" in the first stage, where all thoughts and feelings can be mixed with each other, and then compile the material into a mobile exhibition.

## THE ART OF CONVERSATION

The creative workshop was established because there was a need among our participants to express themselves. When the workshop opened, about ten participants came each day and now, a few years later, the daily number is 30. All the organization did was to contribute material, give space, and highlight something that was already going on, the rest was done by the participants themselves. Speaking out - to be heard and seen - should be considered a human right and a basic human need, to be equated with food, warmth, and clothing, despite the difficulty to compare needs.



The Museum of Lost and Found Things



Here I can relax and be myself. I get new energy after being in the workshop” Daniel

As many of our participants are struggling with personal problems, the creative workshop often provides a much needed break from the problems, allowing participants to gather the strength to tackle them, as well as a general opportunity to create something that they can then show off and be appreciated for. By participating in the work of the creative workshop, an opportunity arises to be acknowledged and appreciated as something other than a social problem, something that many of our participants are otherwise defined as. Being creative and doing things together also creates a bridge in the meeting between people, that often leads to casual and mutual conversations between participants, but also between participants and staff. Many benefits arise from the conversations that are allowed to develop while doing something together. When we do something together that no one is really an expert in, the conversation is enhanced by being equal in the face of the uncertainty of the situation. This is especially true when it comes to art, as it is an activity without a “correct result,” and in the best case, this makes the meeting and conversation more mutual

and non-hierarchical. The conversation often becomes more relaxed when it begins with two equal persons doing something together and can be focused towards what the individuals wants to achieve. The problems are usually present enough that they come up in the conversation anyway, but because of the shift in perspective, they often arise in a different way.

If you think of the conversation as a basic creative activity – as a first opportunity to build something new together – then the creative workshop is a natural next step to help make connections and build relationships. Perhaps the question we should be asking is not “how can we solve someone’s problem?”, but “what can we build together?”

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**Skåne Stadsmission:** is an idea-based organization with activities in three locations in southern Sweden.

Skåne Stadsmission is a non-profit foundation, and its activities are financed by donations, grants, contracts and sales revenue.

Skåne Stadsmission works with people living in vulnerable situations. We offer professional support, both acute and long-term, through our work at open meeting places, residential homes, health clinics and social enterprises. Our clients include women and men living in homelessness, with addiction and mental health problems, young people who need adult support, women in need of a safe place to live, people who are unemployed and lonely older people seeking social community.

# THE RAINBOW SOULCLUB: IN CONVERSATION WITH ARTISTS SASKIA JANSSEN AND GEORGE KORSMIT

A “Free Advice” performance in which the audience asks advice from a homeless person, a free working method where there is no pressure and “nothing is necessary”, the Rainbow Soulclub is a creative collective that turns the tables. Visual artists Saskia Janssen and George Korsmit explain how the Rainbow Soulclub offers mutual opportunities for friendship and creativity, and contributes to unravelling prejudices.

[The Rainbow Soulclub](#),<sup>1</sup> an initiative of visual artists Saskia Janssen and George Korsmit, was established in September 2005 and involves weekly meetings and collaborative projects between artists, art students and clients of [De Regenboog Groep](#)<sup>2</sup> (The Rainbow Foundation). De Regenboog Groep provides shelter and care for homeless people and hard drugs users in Amsterdam. The encounters of the Rainbow Soulclub take place in the foundation's drop-in centers and drug consumption rooms<sup>3</sup> and have spawned a whole spectrum of activities over recent years: painting, drawing, pasting up posters in the city, altering street nameplates (albeit illegally), making pottery, shooting videos, hypnosis sessions, providing opportunities to write letters, to cook, to design new fonts, record music, make costumes, drive campaigns, and even transmit cosmic energy.



For FEANTSA's Spring Magazine, I talked with Saskia Janssen and George Korsmit about their unique art project at the drop-in centre for homeless (addicts) in Amsterdam.

1 See also [www.instagram.com/rainbowsoulclub](http://www.instagram.com/rainbowsoulclub)

2 See also <https://www.deregenboog.org>

3 In Dutch this is called *een gebruikersruimte*. Not to be confused with coffee shop. It is a secluded part of the drop-in centre where it is tolerated to use hard drugs under controlled conditions, (i.e. safe and hygienic manner).

## What is the Rainbow Soulclub?

"The Rainbow Soulclub is a collective that meets regularly to exchange ideas and collaborate in all kinds of areas. The starting point for these meetings is a mutual curiosity about each other's lives. We strive to do things together that we cannot do without each other. All ideas - from various angles - are seriously examined and, if possible, actually implemented together. In the past years, this has resulted in a wide variety of projects. We regularly go on field trips. We visit museums and exhibitions and we even made trips to Ghana and Suriname, where some of the members have their roots. Above all, the Rainbow Soulclub is a club based on friendship, respect and solidarity. Because we have known each other for so long, the group has a solid basis of trust. Trust is something that certainly had to grow in the beginning. What we have now is the result of long-term and constant involvement. The work of art is not the primary goal. Being together and doing things together are paramount."

## What project did you like most, or was most meaningful to you?

"In 2011 we made a trip to Accra, Ghana, that was very special. We traveled with 11 Soulclubbers to help the Bokemei Foundation. The foundation built a school and knowledge center for disadvantaged children in a suburb of Accra. Just before the school opened we painted it and also made various murals. For some Rainbow Soulclub members it was very valuable, to swap roles and become the helper instead of being the 'client' or somebody in need of help. The idea to travel to Ghana came from Rainbow Soulclub member Ebby. He was born in Ghana but lived in the Netherlands for many years and wanted to do something for his country despite his addiction."




## What can people with homes learn from homeless people?

"Homeless people, or rather we say "people experiencing homelessness" are good at improvising, going with the flow and adjusting plans when needed. They have to, because often they live from day to day or week to week. They do not have the luxury to look at life with a long term perspective. And they are good at putting things into perspective. Something that seems a huge disaster to us, is only 'a minor issue' for them. There are worse things in life.

Furthermore, we find that prejudices evaporate when you meet people in person and actually talk to them. When students or other guests enter a drop-in centre for the first time, they often feel a bit uncomfortable, or wary, or maybe even a little scared. That is especially true about the drug user space, but usually they get a warm reception. Clients of the drop-in center are good hosts. They offer coffee and a chair and are surprisingly open to conversation. We like you to experience first and foremost that homeless people are like you and me. People who have taken or had to take a turn somewhere in life. This often puts them in a place where it is very difficult to return from.

We have a performance explicitly about "learning from the homeless" that we perform on a regular basis. It is called *Free Advice*. Members of the Rainbow Soulclub are seated somewhere with two stools and a *Free Advice* sign that invites you to take a seat at the empty stool. Once seated, individuals from the audience are offered a free "advice session". You can get free advice in various areas: about life in general, but also, for example, financial advice, about love, or philosophical questions. Different members of the Rainbow Soulclub each have their own specialties, expertise and life experience. The underlying idea for this performance is both simple and effective: we



# We strive to do things together that we cannot do without each other.”

again turn the tables. A homeless person becomes the ‘counsellor’, you take part in the conversation as the ‘client’. There is a lot you can learn from a homeless person. Although these conversations are completely confidential, we regularly get great feedback from the public that the free advice they were given was food for thought. When you look at all the [pairs] exchanging matters of the heart, as an outsider you can no longer see who is homeless and who is not, and that it doesn’t matter what you are, it’s about the conversations.”

## **What are the most important lessons the two of you learned from Rainbow Soulclub members?**

“Saskia: I had more than one insight, but the first thing that comes to mind is the following: Rainbow Soulclub member Govert made a beautiful book himself. It contained hundreds of pages of meticulously handwritten texts and drawings. It was a whole system. It was really beautiful, a life’s work that he had been working on for years and which he had carried with him every day. One day it disappeared from the table in the drop-in centre when he went to the toilet. It

was taken or thrown away by someone, we still don’t know. For a moment the grief was great, but after a day Govert decided that it was as it was and that there was nothing else to do than just let it go and start over with good courage and without a trace of bitterness. It was letting go with a capital L!

“George: One of the things that always strikes me is the solidarity within the group. I have seen so many times that when someone who is in a very difficult situation himself has the strength to do something for someone else. For example, to share a last plate of food or to give away a nice coat. We also sometimes hear from clients that they experience more solidarity now than before they were in this situation. Even if you have little, even then it is possible to share with those who have even less.”

## **What advice would you like to give to people who want to use art as a method to come into better contact with homeless people and want to make the world more inclusive?**

“The most important thing you have to be aware of, is that it is necessary to commit to a group of people or a location for a longer period of time. Building mutual trust and friendship is of key importance and cannot be done in a short time. You have to be open minded, non-judgmental and you have to leave your agenda behind. Do not try to reach any goals. These people already have so much to do and so many things on their mind. Take the time to find out together what special things can happen and always listen carefully to the ideas that come from the clients, even if they seem impossible to implement.

We would also like to stress that we are not social workers or caregivers. We are not the managers of the Rainbow Soulclub and we do not want to be managers. We do not sell paintings of the homeless. And although we are both also teachers at art academies, our role is not to teach art in the walk-in house. We do not have the intention to teach anyone anything and we do not expect to get anything in return.

Nothing is necessary. There is no pressure and there is no purpose behind the Rainbow Soulclub, also very importantly, there is no agenda. The Rainbow Soulclub is about making contact, real contact. And that takes time. It takes as long as it takes for one to change their perceptions of people without homes from strange 'homeless addicts' into 'people just like us'."

[www.instagram.com/rainbowsoulclub](http://www.instagram.com/rainbowsoulclub)

A short film about and by the Rainbow Soulclub can be seen at:  
<https://vimeo.com/465708622>



“One of the things that always strikes me is the solidarity within the group. I have seen so many times that when someone who is in a very difficult situation himself has the strength to do something for someone else.”



**W**rocław, one of the main urban centres in Poland, is a cradle of creative initiatives for people experiencing homeless. The writers of this article present two unique projects in detail: MiserArt, which offers homeless people the opportunity to grow as artists as well as business people, and Cinema Albert Productions, an independent low-budget documentary and feature film company created by homeless people.

# WROCLAW: A CRADLE OF INITIATIVES FOR INTERVENTION AND INTEGRATION

By **Małgorzata Sieńczyk, Aneta Szarfenberg, Dariusz Dobrowolski, Maciej Gudra, Andrzej Ptak**

Wrocław is one of the main urban centres in Poland, where the modern dimension of social policy and solving the problem of homelessness is shaped. Apart from Warsaw and Gdańsk, Wrocław is a leader in testing and implementing social innovations. Thanks to the support of the city authorities and the activity of non-governmental organizations, the scale and dimension of social exclusion is decreasing, and people at risk of marginalization find support, person-centred treatment and a chance of social reintegration.

The range of Wrocław's social services for people experiencing homelessness includes both intervention and integration services. Innovations such as the "A Streetcar Named Heating", in which, in the wintertime, people living on the streets can get warm, drink tea, eat warm soup and receive help from a streetworker, have been successfully introduced and are now popular in other cities in Poland.

Wrocław is also the cradle of initiatives which, although successfully implemented in Europe and the world, have few followers in Poland. An example here is Wrocław CUP - International Street Football Championships for the Homeless, which is played in about 60 countries, and of which tournaments have been taking place from 2009 in Wrocław. The main idea of the project is to undermine the negative stereotypes held about the homeless community. First and foremost, these are individuals with ambitions, goals, and a genuine desire for a better future. The Wrocław Cup is a great opportunity for the homeless community to integrate socially, to achieve goals, to learn how to compete, maintain healthy habits, and to live a fulfilling life.

Wrocław also developed special initiatives, unique not only in Poland but also in the world. Undoubtedly one of them is MiserArt - a cultural zone in the maze of exclusion - Wrocław's cultural space, where the borderline worlds of art and homelessness merge.



Wrocław CUP – photograph by Małgorzata Sieńczyk



MiserArt, a creative zone in the maze of exclusion, has existed in Wrocław's Nadodrze district since September 2014 as part of the activities of the Homo Sacer Foundation and the Wrocław branch of the Saint Brother Albert's Aid Society. It is a meeting place and a common workplace for homeless people, streetworkers, artists and craftsmen. It is a studio, an art gallery, a workshop of crafts and upcycling, and a café. In MiserArt various relations and often extreme experiences intermingle, enriching each other. Here homeless people are involved in the creative process on an equal level with the partners involved. MiserArt combines various activities - from a recycling carpentry workshop, a bread baking workshop,

# “The film set becomes a place for improving one’s relationship with the environment or developing contact with others.”

upcycling, screen printing, to a theatre, concert and exhibition hall, and a streetworking workshop with a street outpatient clinic.

The MiserArt community is made up of people with experience of homelessness and streetworkers; some are artists, others are friends engaged in the surrounding world. Through their actions they try to awake in people who are homeless and in themselves an aesthetic awareness mature enough that they can become artists. They write about themselves: “We want to adjust the aesthetical everyday life, provoking the imagination to creative development. We do not change the other person, but their environment. Through encounters and daily attentive relationships we help to free people with the experience of homelessness from labels that exclude them.”

MiserArt is also an experiment powered by the principles of the social economy where homeless people learn not only how to grow as artists, but also how to run a successful business. They deepen the sense of aesthetics and try to transfer their extremely difficult life experiences into a process of art creation. That is why each of the artistically crafted tables, created here with a true passion, has




MiserArt team and the craft-table, source: <https://www.facebook.com/MiserArt>

its own inspiring human story behind. MiserArt's newest venture is to launch a school with an upcycling design studio that will allow for the development of design, technology of producing applied art in cooperation with people with experience of homelessness, and practical implementation of projects in the workshops of an open EcoBauhaus factory. An important area of the school will be ecology, in particular designing green space using waste materials.

The year "in the time of pandemic" was totally and globally different for everyone. There were many new challenges and only a handful of MiserArt staff. The activity required close relations, but this closeness and these relationships were forced to hide behind masks and be conducted across distances, it was difficult to "be" engaged as before, fully, with those affected by homelessness, as well as with each other. "Art for Miser", an attempt to invite people into the artistic space, was also not easy as the focus on the street was considered a priority in this strange time. The daily work was accompanied by a struggle with the lack of closeness, of face-to-face meetings, as well as the need for multidimensionality that art brings. Everyone is waiting for normality, which will allow us to meet just like that, over a cup of tea. You can find MiserArt on [Facebook](#) or [check the website](#).

The second unique project is Cinema Albert Productions. It is an independent low-budget documentary and feature film company created by homeless people.

In December 2005, an informal film group acting for the benefit of the Wrocław Branch of St. Brother Albert's Aid Society (TPBA) was established and named Cinema Albert Production. In 2006, two films "Sie masz Wiktor [Howdy Victor]" and "Pielgrzym [Pilgrim]" were



**In MiserArt various relations and often extreme experiences intermingle, enriching each other."**

produced. In 2007 "Sie masz Wiktor" qualified for the Polish Film Festival in Gdynia in the independent cinema category. In 2008 the film "Skopani [Kicked out]" - based on facts - was made and thanks to all these productions a more real image of the people who experience homelessness is slowly getting through to a wider audience.

Film therapy is as old as film itself. It softens mores, elevates the mood, makes people feel more sophisticated. People who are surrounded by beauty are less inclined to use violence, force or destructive behaviour, they become more inventive and creative. Access to a good film, music or the beauty of nature makes a person better. An illusion seen in a movie becomes the beginning of a path on which people begin to take responsibility for their actions and their life. The film set becomes a place for improving one's relationship with the environment or developing contact with others. People can learn how to have a positive attitude towards themselves, try acquiring skills

necessary for a sober life, and put their emotional life in order. They learn to understand themselves by impersonating various characters or by replicating their previous behaviour, in order to analyse it and to draw satisfactory conclusions.

The use of a hypothetical scenario in a film to facilitate the understanding of certain behaviours, phenomena, situations, serves one's development and sense of security. By creating such films, one can talk about dreams, anger, disappointments, show oneself, face one's own weaknesses, be soothed by a film, understand one's own complexes and negative emotions. Watching such films becomes a discovery of the map of one's soul.

Since 2006, 15 films have been recorded, and another is in development. You can find the film studio on [Facebook](#) and [Brother Alberts Aid Society's website](#).

Exiting homelessness is a long process demanding a huge effort from a person in a homelessness crisis. This process will not always end with the kind of success which is understood as an independent life in one's own apartment. This does not mean, however, that people in situations of homelessness are doomed only to struggle to change their life and to live in a support centre for life. It is possible to become active and develop as a person, an artist, a person involved in social and cultural life. Indeed, homeless people can create something valuable for the local community. And the described projects show exactly this – the human dimension of the homeless life.



By Dariusz Dobrowolski

The Homeless Film Festival is an artistic initiative which seeks to raise awareness about the situation of groups at risk of social exclusion and people who experience homelessness, utilizing the theatre and cinema as means for empowerment. This article expounds upon the different creative elements that comprise the festival and what can be gained from the whole.

# THE HOMELESS FILM FESTIVAL: RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT THE SITUATION OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

By **Alberto Gaston**, Emaus Solidarité/Homeless Film Festival



The Homeless Film Festival is an artistic initiative which seeks to raise awareness about the situation of groups at risk of social exclusion and people who experience homelessness, utilizing the theatre and cinema as means for empowerment. This festival, born in the UK in 2011, is based around creating audiovisual short movies, which, combined with professional and amateur actors and producers, are screened to the public, helping them to reflect on the causes and consequences of homelessness. Having previously been hosted in different locations, in 2016 the organization Bizitegi, in close collaboration with the local authority, showed interest in the festival and started organizing it on a regular basis in Bilbao. In 2019, Emaús Fundación Social asked Bizitegi about the chance of hosting the event at San Sebastian, a city with a strong tradition of cultural events, such as, the renowned San Sebastián International Film Festival (SSIFF). In this way, and under the principle of respecting Emaús and Bizitegi's territorial scope, both organizations were able to start a collaboration, seeking synergies with the aim of increasing the impact of the festival and further improving social cohesion.

The festival has two main objectives, focused on two different audiences. On the one hand, it seeks to raise public awareness about the dramatic situations homeless people have to deal with in their daily life. In particular, the focus is on raising awareness among young people due to the transformative power they have in the construction of a fair and cohesive society. In this sense, the festival also promotes a debate about the causes of homeless and possible strategies to be implemented in the future in order to eradicate it.

On the other hand, the festival gives the leading role to homeless people, the ones who sadly suffer the consequences of living without a home and who are too often invisible to society, which ignores them and neglects to grant them equal basic human rights.

Homeless people are empowered by taking part in the organization of the festival. Social workers ensure that there is a strong, positive working environment between homeless people and young people, to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences between both groups.

We believe in the power of cinema and audiovisual arts, because of its catalytic role when bringing young people closer to social exclusion situations as a way of offering a better understanding for situations of social exclusion. To this end, we host different exchange workshops for students between 14 to 16 years old and homeless people who already take part in Emaús social programs, to facilitate the sharing of first-hand experiences. The workshops are hosted not only in schools, but also in the social services Emaús manages, in order to improve the students' understanding of the context and the reality that later on they will have to translate to the screen.

The students, organized into teams, have to record and produce a short movie which will be screened at the Homeless Film Festival. In the festival the public can see also films made by other filmmakers, both amateur and professional.

During the Homeless Festival a play is also performed. It is a community theatre performance, built on the experiences and interests of the participants/actors, who take part in the social programs focused on homeless people. For instance, the groups [Kuskurum](#) (Bilbao), [Zenbatu](#) (Bilbao), [Mujereando](#) (Sevilla), [Yeses](#) (Madrid) or [Arrelísticos](#) (Barcelona), who have taken part in different editions of the festival, are all related to organizations which work in the field of social exclusion.



# The ongoing processes of the play and filmmaking allow us to sustain social participation spaces and thus, generate connections between students and groups who are at risk of social exclusion.”

The ongoing processes of the play and filmmaking allow us to sustain social participation spaces and thus, generate connections between students and groups who are at risk of social exclusion. These connections contribute to the elimination of prejudices and the empowerment of homeless people, encouraging their autonomy and building their confidence in advocating for their rights as citizens.

The day of the festival is the culmination of these processes. It is divided into two different sessions. The first one takes place in the morning, as all the participating schools watch the student-made short movies and one of the plays. This session is integrated into their academic routine, frequently as part of the social studies curriculum. During the afternoon, the Homeless Film Festival is opened to the public, with the aim of mainstreaming the contents. A forum is run in both the morning and afternoon sessions, to give a platform to the different voices of those who have taken part in the festival.

During 2020, because of COVID, it has not been possible to host the Homeless Festival as usual. In Bilbao, Bizitegi has decided to maintain the festival and stream it to audiences. In San Sebastian, it has been cancelled, but we have been able to maintain the awareness raising program with two schools, albeit adapted to health restrictions which has had an adverse effect on in-person exchanges. In fact, both schools and social programs are still trying to maintain “bubble spaces” and restrict personal contacts to the strictly necessary. To get around this, we have given homeless people the opportunity to record themselves and share their own experiences. They received tips on how to use the camera and some other basic instructions, which gave them space to express their creativity and merge with other artistic disciplines.

We hope that by the last term of 2021 (November) we will be able to host the Homeless Film Festival again, taking up the process in full, and contribute to improving social cohesion through the power of the arts.



The High Hopes choir gives a voice to its 90+ members, all of whom are people experiencing homelessness. In this article Glenn Alexander, Managing Coordinator of High Hopes Choir outlines of how music has benefitted choir members, while touching on some of the Choir's major achievements.

# HEAR MY VOICE: THE ROLE OF THE HIGH HOPES CHOIR IN TACKLING SOCIAL EXCLUSION



By **Glenn Alexander**, Managing Coordinator, High Hopes Choir

Having worked in the field of homelessness for over 15 years and for many years using skills that I acquired to create a connection with individuals, I was always looking for tools or resources that would help homeless individuals to engage with myself, other workers, and organisations. Whether it was social clubs, activities, residents' meetings or one to one learning, I was always on the lookout for something that would spark this engagement. However, either through professional relations or organisational policies and procedures, it always felt orchestrated or overly formal, while naturally the buy-in from individuals will always be tinged with a certain level of apprehension or fear of opening themselves up.

When we engage with individuals affected by homelessness and we create a professional working relationship (and for me it is important to remember as well as to convey to a vulnerable person) you are asking to borrow something from them for a short while. You are asking that for a short time you borrow their voice and speak on their behalf; you borrow their conscience for decision making, letting them know what you think is good or bad for them to be involved in and, most importantly, you borrow their trust to share how they feel about past, present, or future.

You are asking all of these things with a view to building that person up with self-esteem, self-worth, and self-confidence.

You are getting them to a point where you can give back everything you have borrowed from them because they can now manage to hold those pieces themselves and move forward in their lives.

However, in my experience it is often the times that when we are holding these pieces, that far too often the critical engagement breaks down due to factors such as re-employment, re-housing, funding, addiction, poor mental health, or organisational restructuring. A person gets left again having loaned their voice, trust and conscience

**Our invitation was  
‘We have a space, can you  
speak? You have a voice,  
do you want to use it?’”**

to a worker or professional, only for them to be asked by someone new in the next engagement tool or professional relationship to once again give something of themselves. They become withdrawn to a point of isolating themselves from other individuals, professionals, and ultimately society.

Here for me is where the formation of The High Hopes Choir became such an important element in tackling isolation; creating an engagement resource for individuals that did not require me to ask anything from members except to use their voice in a literal sense.

Our invitation was “We have a space, can you speak? You have a voice, do you want to use it?”

The High Hopes Choir is the culmination of Ireland's first homeless choir, with more than 90 homeless adults, all dealing with Ireland's homeless crisis, reaching beyond their stars, engaging with the public, empowering themselves with self-confidence, and, of course, entertaining. Moreover, the choir is completely run by the members with the only professional being a Musical Director.

In the last few years, the choirs have performed at numerous high-profile events around the country and beyond. Performing in the European Parliament, playing for the President in Áras an Uachtaráin, singing the National Anthem for the Wales v Ireland game in the Aviva Stadium, headlining the Olympia Theatre in Dublin and their highlight, performing for Pope Francis in Croke Park, which reverberated around Europe.

There is something untouchable about music. There is something about music that defies all explanation. J.K. Rowling perhaps put it best, when she wrote this of Dumbledore, the headmaster of Hogwarts: "Ah, music," he said, wiping his eyes, "A magic far beyond all we do here."

Singing in a choir can lead to a sense of achievement, an increase in self-esteem, increased confidence, self-discipline, and provide a means of self-expression. Participating in The High Hopes Choir promotes friendship with like-minded people, it builds self-confidence,

social skills, social networking, a sense of belonging, teamwork, responsibility, commitment, mutual support, bonding to meet group goals, most importantly it provides an outlet for relaxation.


The positive effects of engagement with music for this choir on personal and social development will only occur if, overall, it is an enjoyable and rewarding experience. The quality of the teaching, the extent to which the members perceive that they are successful, and whether it is a positive experience in the long-term will all contribute to the feeling of personal or social benefit.

The High Hopes Choir has truly touched hearts. Music has the power to give a voice to those whose voices are not often listened to. Every song tells a story, and every single member of the High Hopes Choir has a story to tell – a story that may contain unfathomable loneliness, but it also contains courage and faith and strength and honour. It is also a story that conveys remarkable hope.

Exceptional, amazing, and inspiring, every time the High Hopes Choir sing, the people who make it up, remind us of how far they have come – and in doing so, they remind us of how far we can all go. Every time they sing, they subtly convey a fabulous message - that we can get knocked down, but we do not have to stay down, that we can fall but we can also rise.

They also show us something that we have learned to be true in our own experience in our own lives. We see how music allows people to come together to create. It injects people with confidence. It calls on people to express themselves. It begs them to flourish.

Music celebrates. It communicates. It speaks when words are not enough; it brings us all together.



Every song tells a story,  
and every single member  
of the High Hopes Choir  
has a story to tell”

**CAIS** Recicla is a creative workshop in which beneficiaries of CAIS transform industrial waste created by companies into eco-friendly stationery products. In this article Nuno Carmo explains how the social economy of CAIS Recicla responds to more than one pressing issue and how the project can help those who have been out of the job market for a while to (re)gain skills and confidence.

# CAIS RECICLA: WE TRANSFORM EVERYTHING - LIVES, FIRST OF ALL



By **Nuno do Carmo**, Coordinator of Centro CAIS Porto and manager of CAIS Recicla

CAIS Recicla is a transformative workshop that reduces waste and transforms lives. We are a project of Associação CAIS, a portuguese NGO which has for 27 years aimed to contribute to the improvement of living conditions of citizens at risk of social exclusion, for human dignity, through training and employability.

At CAIS, our action falls under 3 main pillars: (1) **Training**, leading to (2) **employability**, while at the same time fostering (3) **reflection** within wider society on matters of poverty and exclusion.

Whilst our first and most known project has been our magazine, developed with the same philosophy of the UK's *Big Issue* magazine, where 70% of the sales' price reverts to the seller, we have for the past 10 years been developing social businesses, and CAIS Recicla is, today, our most established one.

The project started being developed when we noticed two main issues: that our partner companies often had large amounts of industrial materials going to waste, and that there was a lack of opportunities for people with low qualifications and in a situation of vulnerability.

The solution we found was a creative workshop that transforms industrial waste created by companies into eco-friendly stationery products - with these products being handcrafted by beneficiaries from CAIS and then being sold to companies or to the general public.

We therefore have two main objectives: one is environmental, to reduce the amount of materials going to waste, and the other is social, to train our beneficiaries and increase their likelihood of integrating into the job market in a successful manner.



One of the main difficulties we face when it comes to the employability of people in a situation of vulnerability is that there are no adequate projects through which people who have been removed from the formal job market for a long time can (re)gain skills and confidence. In addition to the loss of technical skills and routines that people may experience over a period of unemployment, they will face the additional challenge of readjustment that the transition to new employment can hold. For some of these people, starting a new job often leads to a drastic and unsustainable transition - sometimes the difficult part is not getting people to integrate into the job market, but making sure they can *sustain* that job.



We provide people in a situation of vulnerability with the means to develop and solidify their personal and professional skills and, consequently, increase the likelihood of a successful, sustainable integration in the formal job market. We develop specific paths according to the different beneficiaries of the project, adapting schedules and workloads. We also adapt our creative processes to the beneficiaries. Cutting something is different from counting pages; measuring something different from folding something. We try to adapt our processes to the people we work with, so that they can be comfortable with what we are doing.

Parallel to these working skills, we also have group activities called ADPS [roughly translated as Activities for Personal and Social Development], where we work with 17 skill sets that are essential for any successful integration into the job market and for living in a democratic society - from empathy, to perspective, to teamwork and conflict resolution, to decision making and leadership. The whole logic behind this approach is that our beneficiaries regain routines, and then develop all the skills mentioned in a way that makes sense to them and is not imposing.

CAIS Recicla is not a recent project, but it has undergone a wave of structural changes since 2018. A new management team brought together a different philosophy that aimed to first solidify internal processes, then overhaul the image and lines of communication, to then expand and consolidate the project.

These changes had an immediate impact, with production growing 10x from the first to the second semester, and with new tools and machines [the main acquisition being a sewing machine].

This wave of transformation meant more processes were done internally, which added a layer of complexity to the internal management, but also made the project more transformative. In 2018, 13 beneficiaries were involved in the project, and there was a drastic increase in pieces produced and sales.

2019 continued, with us being able to recruit a new head hand crafter, new machinery - including an electric guillotine, and to develop new products for new clients. The biggest step was, nevertheless, the renovation of a space that was being used as a warehouse for the Centre. We have completely transformed the space into a showroom/workshop, so that the general public can come and see our products and processes. We wanted to gain that dimension, where we could be accessible and transparent.

Along with these transformations we have expanded our customer base, shipping products to new clients in Portugal and Luxembourg. This resulted in an even bigger increase in production, totalling 10,281 pieces for the year [+125,51% when compared to 2019], and an increase in revenue of 87%.

Our plans for 2020 were, of course, greatly affected by the pandemic, but we have used the first lockdown to develop a new image and communication strategy, by focusing on three main pillars - lives, products, and clients/partners.

The logic here is threefold. We transform the *lives* of the beneficiaries we work with, the *products/materials* we have access to, reinventing them all with creativity, and of *clients/partners* that choose to cooperate with us, and therefore are creating social and environmental impact.

We also involve our clients in our process even more. From brochures, to posters, to packages, to letterhead paper, most organizations will have materials that are obsolete, so we try to integrate them into our finished products - we have lately been producing products without any virgin materials, i.e. only using waste materials, which generates an even bigger positive environmental impact, but also creates a more emotional connection between the client and the product.

We have also tried to develop better impact measurement tools, to understand our project in the three dimensions mentioned above.

Handcrafters are evaluated in how much they have developed professional skills but also in their personal well-being. We have been noticing a pattern in people highlighting the impact the work has on their well-being, as they do not just feel that they are a part of a horizontal and democratic project or contributing to a bigger



cause, but also that they are busy and that their self-esteem is boosted. Today, we have people who actively come to us in order to be involved in our production and, because of that, we have progressively increased the number of beneficiaries that cooperate with the project, from 11 to 19 in just two years.

When it comes to products, we produced, last year, 7,230 products that originated from the transformation of 57,162 donated materials.

We have also tried to involve civil society more in the project, establishing new partnerships with universities and key partners. This broadened participation led to us producing bags for a foundation for one of the main private tv channels in the country, products for one of the largest waste management companies, international companies, weddings, and even a hip hop artist. Our orders have increased over 50% when compared to 2019. 100% of our customers answered they would order again and recommend our products, rating their overall satisfaction at 4.75 out of 5.

All these steps have resulted in us being the best ranked project in Porto's Municipal Social Entrepreneurship Awards, which allows us to transform the project even more.


2021 will be the year where we finish renovating part of the space we are using, so that we can use it to its full potential. We are also launching a new personalised line of products.

We have, for the first time ever, hired someone to work with us full time. We are also preparing the launch of our online store and acquiring new machinery and tools that will allow us to expand our transformative processes, with manual printing processes like serigraphy and linography.

Throughout the years, 100+ beneficiaries have participated in the project; 75,000+ products have been made, with the cooperation of 10+ designers. Notably, 25% of the beneficiaries have integrated into the job market. The remaining became empowered with training and qualifications.

We will continue to be open to finding ways of positively impacting the lives of our beneficiaries and reducing waste. We hope you can join us in this wave of transformation.

Do reach out to us in [caisrecicla@cais.pt](mailto:caisrecicla@cais.pt)  
Find us on [linktr.ee/caisrecicla](https://linktr.ee/caisrecicla)

 We provide people in a situation of vulnerability with the means to develop and solidify their personal and professional skills and, consequently, increase the likelihood of a successful, sustainable integration in the formal job market.”



The *C'est Pas du Lux* festival brings together the social sector, artists, and cultural structures to around creative projects to promote the empowerment of vulnerable people. In this article, Sibylle Arlet and Florine Siganos present a handful of inspiring creative projects that feature in the festival alongside testimonies from the people who have taken part.

# C'EST PAS DU LUXE ! *(THIS IS NO LUXURY!)* :

## ACCESS TO AND EMPOWERMENT THROUGH CULTURAL ACTIVITY

By **Sibylle Arlet & Florine Siganos**, Fondation Abbé Pierre

For 30 years, the Abbé Pierre Foundation has been working to ensure that the most disadvantaged have access to decent housing.

Our strategy is threefold:

**Raise awareness** / through our communication campaigns and publications, but also through our recognized expertise with the annual publication of the report on the State of Housing Exclusion in France.

**Act** / to reduce housing exclusion, by providing financial support, and by stimulating and accompanying a multitude of actions within our network.

**Innovate** / we advocate for decent and dignified living conditions. As such, we support access to culture and citizenship, especially for the most vulnerable. In fact, alongside vital needs, culture occupies a primary place in our organization. It was an intuition of our founder, Abbé Pierre, who included culture in the statutes of the Foundation: «To promote neighborhoods and communities' social and cultural life, which contribute to improving the promotion and integration of families in housing exclusion.»

## OUR CONVICTIONS IN FAVOUR OF ART-BASED PRACTICES

The connection with the sensory, the place of art, is not superfluous nor a supplement to the soul. Culture is first and foremost a right, the right to express oneself freely, to experience one's own cultural practices, to develop and share knowledge. It enlightens everyone

in their understanding of the world, in their ability to make common sense. In addition to a roof and basic needs, culture is fundamental as a powerful lever for empowerment, dignity and citizenship. Many people in precarious situations have little or no access to an artistic practice despite the fact that for them it can mean regaining self-confidence, being looked at differently. Culture makes it possible to expand the relationships induced by social work so that people can be better helped and supported. Quite simply, art and culture create spaces of joy and wonder.

We are working to create a common sense with which to break down stigma. With our approach *C'est pas du luxe!* we believe in the fertility of crossroads, in the absolute need to share collective time, sensitivity and emotions, through that which animates us: our voices, our bodies, our movements, our ideas. Engaging in artistic projects allows us to "make society."

## OUR APPROACH

We promote meetings between artists and social structures, allowing for the development of artistic workshops, residences, and shared creations.

This commitment is materialized through the *C'est pas du luxe!* approach and festival, co-founded in 2012 with *La Garance: Scène nationale de Cavillon* and the association *Le Village*. *C'est pas du luxe!* brings together the social sector, artists, and cultural structures around artistic creation. It supports the long-term development of creative projects, all disciplines combined, between professional artists and people in a situation of exclusion, in a dynamic of

co-construction and strong artistic ambitions. These projects aim to promote the empowerment of vulnerable people and restore their dignity, as well as to decompartmentalize professional practices. Every two years, some of these projects are brought together during a festival, in September in Avignon, France. The objective is to exhibit these creations, which are not otherwise visible to the general public, and to promote the sharing of good practices through debates, discussions and conviviality.

## ***C'EST PAS DU LUXE!* IS BASED ON FOUR LEVERS FOR ACTION:**

1. The mobilisation of its network and the coordination between social and cultural operators for support in setting up the projects.
2. Artistic production between professional artists and disadvantaged people.
3. The organization of an exhibition to show these creations: to give visibility to disadvantaged people and work to change the way society looks at them.
4. Capitalization on what is learnt in order to better understand the effects of these approaches for the most excluded groups, as well as for artists, social workers, social and cultural policies and society as a whole.



**“It is not easy to express your problems in life. With dancing I can do it, it’s quite an art.”**

Fawzia, beneficiary of Passerelle association

## SOME PROJECTS EXAMPLES

### « Vous dansez ? » (Do you dance?)

Foundation Abbé Pierre had the idea for a project that would reposition dance as a universal need, based on the understanding that dance was not very present within the structures of its network, and in response to the impossibility of being physically close to each other during lockdowns. The choreographer Marinette Dozeville and her company were entrusted with the creation of a participatory ball attended by people in vulnerable situations or living in social structures (day centres, temporary accommodation, etc.). Workshops, that were run during 7-day artistic residencies in 3 different places, brought together a dozen structures fighting against exclusion. These residencies were an opportunity to bring together the beneficiaries of these social structures, dance enthusiasts, volunteers, and local residents, among others. The grand participatory ball will be presented during the *C'est pas du luxe !* festival 2021.



### Testimony:

*Fawzia – beneficiary of Passerelle association: “I express myself by dancing. While dancing I express my problems, there is so much sadness, it is deep. It is not easy to express your problems in life. With dancing I can do it, it’s quite an art. There was a very strong and very sensitive communication, the current flowed on, barely touching each other. There are people we didn’t know and we could communicate without knowing each other. I didn’t notice the cameras, I was living my life, I was dancing, it was beautiful!”*

### « Prendre place » (Settle in)

The Abbé Pierre Foundation called on the artists Nicolas Tourte and Christophe Loiseau, respectively videographer and photographer, to imagine the “Prendre Place” project. They proposed to work around a painting of the entourage of Peter Bruegel the Younger: the village fair with a theatre and a procession, exhibited at the Calvet museum in Avignon. In a village square, guests are seated, others are dancing. Part of the crowd attends the performance of a farce, a kind of vaudeville. This painting is, in a way, an allegory of the challenges of living together in today’s world. Using a green screen shooting technique, participants from several regions played the game and were introduced to acting, re-enacting the postures of the painting in period costume. Everyone was led to reflect on what makes society today. The final animated work was presented on a giant screen measuring over 4 meters in a square in the city of Avignon during the 2020 festival.



**Testimony:**

*Bernie - social worker: "The most important thing for residents is access to culture. I am amazed by all the fields we have been able to address through this project, from social bonds and conviviality in the Middle Ages to the challenges of life in society that we face today. We have discovered and shared other forms of art, evoking political subjects, memories shared with their family, their friends.... Participants are valued and proud to participate. This greatly helps our support in self-esteem and the recovery of confidence. Colleagues as well as migrant families joined us, as did the head of the European Institute for Food History and Culture. Throughout the project, no one had any labels, we were all essential characters in this painting, the prejudices had fallen. We had a lot of fun and laughed a lot! And after the lockdown period, this project helped restore the collective momentum that had been somewhat silenced."*

“Colleagues as well as migrant families joined us, as did the head of the European Institute for Food History and Culture. Throughout the project, no one had any labels, we were all essential characters in this painting, the prejudices had fallen.”

Bernie, social worker

# THE NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS: THE CROSSROAD WHERE ARTS AND HOUSING AFFORDABILITY MUST MEET

The New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative was launched by the European Commission in the framework of its “renovation wave”. The core idea of the original Bauhaus was based on a social approach where art was to serve a social role. In this article, Sorcha Edwards explains how the New European Bauhaus contains real potential based on the success of the inclusive, beautiful and affordable housing developed by the members of Housing Europe.



By **Sorcha Edwards**, Secretary General, Housing Europe

A year since the global health pandemic has made staying at home and keeping social distance the new norm, social and affordable housing providers continue going the extra mile to ensure that tenants have a home where they can feel safe. The recently launched 'State of Housing 2021' report clearly shows that as little as a 5% increase of households living in poor housing conditions can result in 50% higher risk of incidence and a 42% chance of losing the battle with the coronavirus. In other words, the strong link between adequate homes and health has now become obvious to governments in all corners of the world.

In many European countries, the COVID-19 crisis has led to growing waiting lists for social housing, impoverishment of tenants, and an increasing necessity to find appropriate stable accommodation for homeless people. While the EU recovery plans focus on the renovation of existing buildings, the supply of adequate affordable housing for low-income households and the most vulnerable groups remains a question mark to a large extent.

Some parts of the jigsaw puzzle are coming together. This January, a solid majority of MEPs voted on the own-initiative report of Dutch MEP Kim van Sparrentak from the Greens who calls for "Access to decent and affordable housing for all" and eradicating homelessness

by 2030. The recently announced Action Plan for the implementation of the European Pillar for Social Rights to set up a 'European Platform on Combating Homelessness' is an important step to tackle an already existing problem. At the same time, the social rulebook of the EU still does not sufficiently address the structural cause – the lack of sufficient housing at a reasonable cost. What is more, solutions to homelessness, such as Housing First, are also in dire need of more social housing to be able to function properly.

The potential of political decisions that could create a unique opportunity for Member States and the EU to overcome social exclusion and invest in social, cooperative housing is greater than we think. In fact, culture and art can get us through quite a lot, even homelessness.

Minutes after the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen announced the new EU "platform for experimentation and connection, fostering collaboration across thinkers and doers who want to design our future ways of living together," hundreds of online searches showed the nuts and bolts of the 'Bauhaus' movement. To describe the original idea with a few words, Bauhaus started as the ambition to benefit from quality, aesthetic housing that should be accessible to all. A second quick search of the vision of public,

**To describe the original idea with a few words, Bauhaus started as the ambition to benefit from quality, aesthetic housing that should be accessible to all."**

cooperative and social housing providers shows that at the core is the “access to decent and affordable housing for all in communities which are socially, economically and environmentally sustainable and where everyone is enabled to reach their full potential.”

Isn't the New European Bauhaus an opportunity to have post-COVID social housing that also helps to decrease the number of 700,000 people in Europe who sleep rough every night? The initiative can certainly deliver what it promises because the mix of inclusive, beautiful, affordable housing with thriving communities is something we see developed by Housing Europe members daily.

Up to 15% of the housing stock owned and managed by the members of the Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH) is occupied by formerly homeless households. This reflects the fact that many housing associations in Ireland have initially started working with groups like homeless people, the elderly or people with disabilities, before later becoming registered providers of social housing. While Irish legislation gives priority to the most vulnerable to access social housing, the extremely high private rents in the country are creating a steady stream of households experiencing homelessness or experiencing housing related precarity. Thus, finding suitable housing in a timely manner remains a challenge for many.

The French l'Union Sociale pour l'Habitat has been working with state authorities to provide increased subsidies and grants for the delivery of housing for the most vulnerable people, which current financing structures in France make extremely difficult, especially in large urban hubs, where the costs of development are higher. USH members have played a leading role in the 'Housing First' (Logement d'abord) strategy in France as it has been rolled out over the past three to four years.

During the COVID crisis, the Austrian Federation of Limited-Profit Housing Associations (GBV) initiated a moratorium on evictions

(ahead of a later national ban), a system of rent deferrals and the provision of extra support to tenants to apply for financial support. All of this has been done with the aim of keeping people in their homes.

To create the much needed boost to the economy and help our communities recover from the shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic, the European wave of renovations will need to 'factor in climate without pricing out people'. In this regard, the currently ongoing revision of the EU's Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) and the EU Green Deal are two make it or break it moments.

Being part of the Renovation Wave Strategy, the New European Bauhaus must take on board the fact that how and where we live is correlated to the financialisation and commodification of housing. Housing is a basic human right and relatively new phenomena, such as short-term rentals in popular destinations that result in empty flats, should turn into places where our communities live in dignity. Undoubtedly, the governance of the initiative would need to bring social actors working on the ground and economists on board.

Investment in Europe's neighbourhoods is one of the truly safe bets that policymakers can make if they want anyone in our communities to thrive. Channeling the necessary funding to avoid unintended consequences on affordability and citizens. Coming back to the potential of the European Pillar of Social Rights to be a true guiding principle of EU policies, the set up of an 'EU Post-COVID Social & Affordable Housing Expert Group as part of the Social Pillar action plan' that brings ministries, cities, stakeholders together to see how our housing systems help meet those objectives, linking it to Bauhaus and the Affordable Housing Initiative under the Renovation Wave can make sure that these initiatives have a clear social stamp mainstreaming the goal of reaching decent housing access to all.



## Cover image

Photo from the archive of Amsterdam art collective Rainbow Soulclub. Free Advice performance by Rainbow Soulclub with Soulclub-member Roy Telgt

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