

YOUTH
IN
THE
CITY

YOUTH IN THE CITY: LA NOSTRA PRATO

GUIDELINES FOR PLANNING AND
RUNNING PARTICIPATORY WORKSHOPS
WITH MULTICULTURAL YOUTH

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OVERVIEW

Prato (Italy), 5 October 2019: The historical refrigerating room of Prato's old public abattoir is buzzing with laughter and excitement as the *Youth in the City: La Nostra Prato* exhibition nears its official launch. People navigate across pictures, maps, interactive stands and a multi-screen video installation, guided by the forty-eight young urban explorers who collectively produced these artworks over a period of five days.

Suddenly the large room is filled with voices in different languages, all speaking at the same time and over each other, as a group of explorers takes centre stage with the performance art intervention that officially inaugurates the exhibition, welcoming everyone into their own re-imagined city. This brief and powerful moment is the culmination of an intensive and challenging week of creative workshops, in which forty-eight high-school students of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds joined us to reclaim their city and present it through their own unique perspectives.

This document reconstructs the days that led to this moment, reflecting on what we learnt as a research team and on the co-creative exploration of Prato that we experienced together with participants. In doing so, it offers guidelines and supporting materials to facilitate the replication of this participatory-action initiative in other cities.

The guide first provides background information on how we planned and ran the participatory workshops at the heart of *La Nostra Prato*, delving deeper into the methodology and approach that we adopted. It then describes the specific activities that we developed with participants, moving from the pre-workshop interactions to the organisation of the public exhibition and offering detailed instructions on how to set up and run each step. Finally, it provides advice on how to follow up on the workshop activities, involving participants in project dissemination activities. Across the document you will also find reflections on what we learnt throughout the workshop, which will help you in identifying potential issues to avoid and offer advice on how to address unexpected challenges.



Students involved in the 'La Nostra Prato' project launch the pop-up exhibition at Officine Giovani, Prato, Italy on 5 October 2019.

WHAT IS YOUTH IN THE CITY?

Youth in the City is an international research initiative led by Monash University that promotes digital participatory action research with multicultural and migrant youth as an effective response to the xenophobic contents that readily spread on social media and in public discourse. We work with young people across the world to reclaim urban space and imagine shared transcultural futures through participatory mapping, co-designed creative interventions and digital storytelling.

In 2019, we conducted our first project in Prato, one of the most multicultural cities in Italy. [Youth in the city: La Nostra Prato](#) was designed and run by Rita Wilson, Francesco Ricatti and Matteo Dutto (Monash University), Luca Simeone, Pieter Overgoor and Yu-Chun Li (Aalborg University), Salvatore Iaconesi and Oriana Persico (Human Ecosystems Relazioni). We applied our expertise in transcultural studies, intercultural communication, interaction design, participatory mapping and digital storytelling, to develop collaborative work with secondary schools in Prato. This pilot project was funded by the [National Geographic Society](#) (NGS-56467E-19), the [Scanlon Foundation](#) and the [City Council of Prato](#).

OUR METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

The *Youth in the City* research initiative is structured around digital participatory action research, and specifically designed participatory events (Delgado 2015; Chevalier and Buckles 2013; Björgvinsson et al. 2012). For this initiative we developed an approach to empower migrant youth to re-imagine, re-map and re-claim urban space as their own (Ricatti, Dutto and Wilson 2019). Our methodology is based on two fundamental pillars. First, the need to challenge traditional models of interaction between scholars and communities in order to develop nonlinear, more authentic and productive modes of cooperation and co-creation between academics and community members (Glick Schiller 2011). Second, open source, engaging and interactive access to the data through digital visualisation and storytelling should be provided together with a higher level of data literacy (de Götzen et al. 2018), to the benefit of policy makers, administrators, community organisations, and the broader society.

Traditional approaches to the study of specific ethnic communities or enclaves tend to underestimate the actual social, cultural and demographic complexity of urban areas with a high presence of migrants. The integration of narratives with visual representations of transcultural processes of emplacement provides essential synchronic and diachronic perspectives on the complex and rapid changes that affect increasingly more diverse urban contexts. The combination of qualitative and participatory research with quantitative data is particularly important when investigating intergenerational processes within transnational migration (Laaroussi 2017).

Participatory action research is particularly indicated to gather the perspective of young people (Shamrova and Cummings 2017). While the importance of the involvement of youths in decision-making processes is constantly acknowledged in documents about human rights (Gal 2017), their active participation in research and policy development remains limited. Effective models for promoting strategies of social inclusion and cohesion require the development of close collaboration and coproduction with young migrants, their classmates and other stakeholders (Matras and Robertson 2017).

For this reason, we intend to contribute to the development of storytelling and digital visualisation models that can better capture, understand, represent and tell the actual ‘heterogeneity, complexity and fluidity’ of superdiverse communities (Goodson and Grzymala Kazkowska 2017). Doing so requires a new focus on migrants’ urban emplacement, understood as the relationship between the constant changes that affect an urban context, the complex transcultural and intersectional networks develop within that context, and migrants’ ability to acquire and accumulate social, cultural and financial capital within the constraints of that specific locality, but also through complex transnational, translocal and global networks (Glick Schiller and Cagkar 2013).

To achieve these objectives our methodology builds on four key principles:

- **Transcultural Framework**

Our framework of reference focuses on the cultural, social and linguistic exchanges and reciprocal influences between different cultures in superdiverse settings. It recognizes the existing power imbalance between different actors and aims at shifting dominant narratives through an activist approach to research that foregrounds the perspectives of migrant youth.

- **Participatory Approach**

Young people are active participants and creators; projects are to their benefit. Workshops must have an impact on the community in which they are run. This should be achieved through the adoption of art-based methodologies and through a public exhibition of creative works by participants. An exhibition is a perfect space where public and self-representation elements coexist. It is public by

definition and if you are an author, you are also personally involved in it: you are acting in the public space and speaking with your voice. Therefore, participants should be considered as authors throughout the whole project.

- **Digital Storytelling Methods**

Digital Storytelling methods inform and are a critical part of the activities run during the workshops. Creative outputs must then be distributed and made accessible to the wider community through digital visualisations and interactive storytelling. This can take different forms depending on the specific project, but digital tools and outputs should be created and shared freely, to the benefit of participants themselves.

- **Educational Outlook**

Schools are one of the key spaces where processes of cultural and linguistic exchange occur on a daily basis. Loosening the barriers between research and civic engagement thus requires the adoption of an educational outlook to build and foster collaborations with students and teachers. Participants must see their work in the project recognized as training/credit by their schools through the implementation of agreements with local partner organizations. Projects should also seek to develop creative outputs that can be used in an educational environment and accompany them with toolkits and guidelines to facilitate their fruition across different levels of education. In this instance this meant developing two separate sets of guidelines: this document, dedicated to facilitating the creation of other workshops, and a Teacher's Guide on how to use *La Nostra Prato* in the classroom, offering advice to educators on how to make the most of the digital storytelling experience through a series of in-class activities tailored for students from age fourteen onwards. Finally, projects should seek to involve tertiary/university level students, providing them with valuable work experience and allowing them to test their skills in a real-life scenario. In this first workshop we worked with two designers who had just completed a Master in Interaction Design at Aalborg University, providing them with a paid work experience. We also recruited two Monash University students enrolled in the Master of Translation and Interpreting for a work-integrated learning experience, in which they translated and created English subtitles for the project documentary.

PLANNING YOUR OWN PROJECT

Each neighbourhood has a different story, and so do the young people who live in it and make it alive. We recognise that each project that might stem from our initiative will respond to its own challenges by setting its own objectives, using new approaches, establishing connections with various local actors and creating innovative results. In this section you will find some tips and advice from our experience in the *Youth in the City: La Nostra Prato* project, which we hope will help shape your own project.

DIGITAL STORYTELLING AND YOUR TEAM

The use of digital storytelling tools is an essential component to provide participants with engaging and interactive ways of expressing themselves and reclaiming their presence in the city. Digital stories move the storytelling process from something experienced in face-to-face groups to an affective digital memory that can be shared across space and time. Building your project around digital storytelling methods benefits participants by providing them with digital skills that will allow them to express themselves creatively across different media. Our approach to the production and use of digital stories in participatory-action workshops is based on the ground-breaking work that Joe Lambert and his group launched in 1994, when they established the Center for Digital Storytelling (now [StoryCenter](#)) to empower personal storytelling through digital technologies. Over the years Lambert has developed a series of excellent resources on how digital storytelling methods can support communities and individuals in telling their own stories, fostering personal reflection, activism and intergenerational connections (Lambert 2018).

The digital storytelling process we adopted in the project consisted of three basic steps:

1. Create a personal narrative;
2. Explore the city and take pictures, videos and audio recordings that reflect your narrative;
3. Discuss the outputs and collate them into a story that can be experienced both digitally and in the project's exhibition.

You will find more details on how each step can be implemented across the workshops later in this document, but before you start thinking about structuring your own digital storytelling activities it is essential to reflect on who will be running them and on what you are setting out to achieve. Digital stories can take a multitude of different shapes and your project will thus require a team with varied competencies and skillsets to help participants express themselves. At the start of the project it is thus essential to answer the following questions:

- What form do you wish your digital stories to take? Are they going to be shared as pictures and videos on a website? Do you prefer instead to transform them in an interactive experience? Is a digital map better suited to convey how each story is emplaced within the urban space you are working in? Researching existing projects is a good way to figure out what the best solution is for your own aims and then shaping your workshop around the final output that you wish to produce with participants.
- What resources and technical abilities will you need to achieve your objective? What technologies and software do you have access to? Can they be used freely? We recommend the use of open-access technologies and software to ensure that the digital storytelling process is as accessible and inclusive as possible for participants.
- Consider the risks and how to minimise their impact. Regardless of the number of youths you will be working with, it is crucial to run the workshops with a team that can manage all the different aspects, even when things might not go according to plan. The workshop is designed to be an intensive and immersive experience for both student participants and team members and it is important to have a clear plan to deal swiftly with any technical issues that may arise.



The landing page of the digital storytelling experience

Lessons Learnt

Our research team for this project was composed of experts in the fields of migration and transcultural studies, digital design, digital storytelling and participatory action research. Having identified the need to document the workshop process we decided to hire a local videographer to support us in this key aspect. We were later joined by two digital designers, who worked with us during the workshops to help participants with the design of promotional materials for the exhibition. While it is important to have a core team of researchers and educators who will set up the project, be open to hiring or involving additional staff as the intensive and participatory nature of this workshop benefits greatly from more hands on deck and from varied skillsets.

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

Spending time gathering information and collecting data will ensure that all the activities you plan will represent the lived reality of the young people you will be working with. Some key research questions to consider include:

- Who lives in this area/neighbourhood/city?
- What is the socio/economic situation of different groups in the area?
- What is the average age of residents?
- How did these areas become what they are today? How have migration flows shaped them?
- What makes this area unique in terms of urban environment?
- What are the key public spaces of aggregation of local youth?
- What public organisations and schools operate in the area? What kind of projects have they run before?
- What kinds of public encounters occur in this area between different cultures and languages?

The answers to these questions will become more nuanced when you start working collaboratively with the young urban explorer who will join the workshops but initial answers could be found by drawing on the following methods:

- Collection and analysis of secondary sources. These can include demographic and socio-economic data; historical documents, photographs and videos; maps and existing research articles on the area.

- Interviews and surveys with local informants;
- Analysis of existing initiatives and projects;
- Informal observation of the area and engagement with local community events.

Lessons Learnt

You can re-utilise much of the quantitative and qualitative research data collected in this preparatory phase to stimulate discussion and engagement during the workshop. These methods will also be useful to establish local connections that will help you in the next steps.

LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

Engaging with local partners like local government, non-profit associations, schools and universities is an essential step in establishing place-based projects that can have an impact on the local community and foster sustained participation. While this might look different from case to case, we recommend starting out by identifying local leaders who have previously engaged in similar initiatives with young residents of the area and share values akin to the ones your project is based upon. Local leaders can be community members or someone who works in a municipal agency, a school or a local non-profit organisation. Background research will be highly valuable to identify your liaison with the community. In our case we worked with the “Tavolo Intercultura della Rete degli Istituti Secondari di Secondo Grado della Provincia di Prato”, a local network of highly-involved and motivated high-school teachers, who over the years have run several successful initiatives with the multicultural youth of Prato.

Once you have identified your local partner it is crucial to establish a partnership that can be beneficial for both parts involved and contribute to the goals of your partners. The eight high-schools that worked with us were extremely interested in the project’s impact on the development of multilingual and intercultural competencies for the participants and teachers involved and we thus adjusted our proposal to ensure that it covered this specific need.

Working with local partners and knowing the community can also create a domino effect, with new partnerships developing spontaneously or more easily through shared connections. This meant for us building on our connections with local high-schools to obtain sponsorship from the City Council of Prato, which gave us access to council owned spaces for the workshops and exhibition.

Lessons Learnt

Establishing contacts and relationships with the local community is a key part of participatory projects, but it often takes time and effort to build the level of trust that is required to secure the commitment of local stakeholders. If you don’t already have links with the specific community you want to work with, it is essential to plan ahead and include enough time in the project plan to build up your network of relationships.

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

Working effectively with youth requires projects that are tailored to their needs and relevant to their lived reality. Engagement with local partners can help you prepare a proposal that will respond to these aspects and draw numerous participants. When asking youth to take part in your project keep in mind the following points:

- Participation needs to be voluntary. For interactions to be ethical and meaningful participants must feel free to opt in and out, without undue pressure from teachers, parents or adults.
- Local youth must get something out of your project. Aside from skills and new experiences what will participants receive from you? Working with local partners and institutions is crucial to figure out ways of making participation count for all people involved. In our case we were

able to link the project to Scuola-Lavoro (School-Work; i.e. work integrated learning) program in the Italian education system. This allowed us to work with the students every day for a full week. Credits, vouchers, or other forms of compensation can also be employed to make it worthwhile for participants.

- Selection must be transparent and inclusive. We understand that each project will have different requirements but the underlying principles should be that it is accessible, inclusive and transformative. Ensuring accessibility and inclusivity is particularly important when working with people who are less likely to be heard due to heritage, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, income, disabilities and language.

Lessons Learnt

Trust your local partners. This might not apply to all projects but letting your local partners lead the recruitment and selection process is an effective solution to ensure that your call reaches as many people as possible. In our case the entire process was run by the local high-school teachers who partnered with us, allowing us to recruit 48 young explorers.

VENUE AND LOGISTICS

In order for your workshop to be effective, participants should work in a safe and relaxed environment, where they can freely express their views and opinions. Avoid schools and other spaces that would make participants feel in a subordinate position. Locations like youth centres and public libraries will be more comfortable for young people and will allow you to work with them on equal and neutral ground.



Officina Giovani: the youth centre in Prato where we ran the La Nostra Prato workshop and exhibition.

When choosing your venue for the workshop ensure that you have free access to high-speed internet, to a projector/screen and to enough charging outlets. Choose a room that is large enough for participants to work comfortably in groups arranged in circles and ensure that they can do so free from interruptions and in a well-lit environment. Given the intensive nature of the workshop ensure that the venue you identify is close enough to the areas of the city that participants will be exploring. We also recommend selecting a venue that has a separate space that you can use for the exhibition. This will ensure that

participants can set up the exhibition without having to rush between different locations and will significantly simplify your own logistics arrangements.

As materials for the exhibition will be produced over the space of a few days it is essential to plan printing and logistics in advance. Start by identifying what shape you wish the exhibition to take. Will you be relying mostly on printed photographs and maps? Do you wish to screen the videos produced by participants? What about an aural landscape constructed with their recordings? Will you need to print postcards or leaflets to advertise your exhibition? Can you set up the exhibition space yourself or do you need the help of skilled professionals/workers? Once you have a clear understanding of what components you need, we recommend establishing agreements with local businesses to ensure that all the components of your exhibition can be produced on time. Local printing services can be more effective than online services if you open a communication channel with them in advance.

Lessons Learnt

It is a good idea to nominate a team member who will oversee logistics on the last days of the workshop. This will ensure that materials are processed and delivered while participants and the other team members take care of the rest of the organisation tasks.

DOCUMENTING THE PROCESS

Producing audio and video documentation of the workshops is a key component of our methodology. Maintaining a digital memory of the work you conduct will allow you to revisit the experience and share your insights with others who might want to replicate it. Since one of our aim is to build a network of *Youth in the City* initiatives, we are keen on hearing what made your project unique and what could instead be improved in your opinion.

To ensure that all steps of the process are thoroughly covered bring along enough audio recorders to document all group discussions with participants. It is also important to close off each day with a brief team debriefing session. Ask all team members to reflect on what worked and what did not during the day. Is there anything you can do to address aspects that did not go as planned? What can be improved the following day? What are the next steps to take? Holding these debrief sessions is crucial not only for the overall success of your project but to ensure that young participants make the most out of it. Adaptation and change are essential components of the experience we designed and holding these debrief session will allow you to foster unexpected issues into strengths.

Video recordings of the workshops are another essential component. Digital storytelling is as much about the process as it is about the final output. Since participants will be busy working on their own projects it is crucial for a team member or for an external videographer to document the key moments of the creative process. These recordings can then be used to supplement the materials produced by participants in the final online digital project, showcasing to the general public the process that lead to the digital stories.

Lessons Learnt

Ask the videographer you are working with or the member of the research team in charge of documentation to take also pictures of some key moments. This will help you in documenting the process in your final report and in other documents you might need to produce.

PRE-WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES

INTRODUCTORY SESSION

A week before the start of the workshop we conducted a brief introductory session with smaller groups of students in their own high schools. Spending time with participants before the start of the actual workshop proved to be very important for us and can give your project the following distinct advantages:

- Get to know the young urban explorers you will be working with ahead and explain the work they will be conducting with you;
- Learn more about their stories, the languages they speak, what they like and what they can do. This information will be helpful when forming the groups for the workshop;
- Discuss with them their own expectations and objectives. Since you are running a participatory workshop it is crucial to acknowledge the personal aims and hopes of each participant and incorporate them into the experience;



Urban explorers producing a collaborative map of the city.

In order to achieve these objectives, we structured our pre-workshop activity as follows. You can tailor the duration of each component depending on your needs.

1) **Welcome and introduction**

It is important to thank participants for their interest in the project, acknowledging the importance of their contribution and addressing any questions they might have. This is also a good moment to go over the practical details of the workshops such as schedule, venue information, wi-fi access codes, materials you will provide, things they need to bring.

2) **Ice-breaker activity: “Questioning Official Maps”**

Divide students in smaller groups and give them different tourist maps of the city you are working in. Each group should have more than one map and needs to spend time reflecting on how each one portrays their city. Ask them to identify what is missing from each map that is important for them and have them add it in.

3) **Focus group**

Participants will use A3 maps of the city in groups to work on each question. Drawing sheets, pens and markers can be used to add additional info on each question and to record emotions

and stories associated to those spaces. The A1 map serves as a larger framework of reference to locate specific areas. We used the following questions:

- What is your favourite place and why?
- Is there a place that you hate or don't really like?
- Where do you live and where do you go to school?
- In what place do you spend more time and why? What parts of town do you usually cross in a regular day?

Throughout the discussion ask questions geared towards emotions; like... What do you feel when you are there? Do you have fun? But don't you get bored? How do you react? Why do/don't you like it? Also listen carefully and interact, for instance if someone says 'No, I hate it', follow up immediately to elicit the reason for that response.

4) Questionnaire

Brief questionnaires can be used to collect information about participants preferred activities in the city, about the languages they speak and about their encounters and interactions with other cultures in their city. Questions could include:

- What are your main interests and hobbies? (multiple choice)
- What languages do you speak and where do you speak them? (open question)
- Where would you take a friend who has never been to your city? Why? (open question)
- Where do you hear, see or interact with other languages in your city? (multiple choice)

Lessons Learnt

The introductory session is most effective when working with groups up to 10 participants. If a school has many students who wish to join the project schedule multiple sessions across different days. Doing so ensures that you can spend enough time with all participants and get to know them better ahead of the workshop.

MEDIA TRAINING SESSION

Before you start the workshops, it is also important to check participants abilities in relation to the kind of media artefacts they will be producing, as well as how used they are to expressing themselves. We suggest organising a separate media training session for smaller groups of urban explorers, where they can familiarise themselves with the technology, learn new skills and draft their first short digital story.

Start by reviewing with students the technology and software you will be using throughout the workshops. In our case this involved:

- Demonstrating free video-making and video-editing apps that participants could use to create their videos;
- Introducing the platform for mobile upload of contents created for the project;
- Showcasing the mobile gimbals and microphones that students will be using to create contents with their own mobile phones;

Follow this up with an introduction to the key principles of photography and videography. We recommend you neither underestimate nor overestimate participants' familiarity with video and audio production. If there are skilled photographers and video makers in the group, ask them to help you in leading this session. Focus on the key principles and practices of photography, introducing them to composition, perspective and lightning. Move on to cover how to capture the best possible audio recordings with the materials you have available. If you have the time to do so introduce also some key video editing tips, focusing on the free software you will be using.

Continue the session with a practical activity by asking participants to interview each other about their favourite place in the city. They should produce a brief 2 to 3 minutes recording of each other. Once they have concluded the interviews get the group back together and watch the videos. Ensure to give positive feedback and tips on how to improve to everyone.

Before you close the session inform participants that they will need to record and edit a brief one-minute video about their favourite place in the city, focusing on the emotions they feel when they are there. The video can take any shape they prefer, be it a recording with music or ambient sound or a series of images with a voiceover narration. This is an essential component for the first activity of Day 1 of the workshops so ensure that all participants understand its importance and make yourself available should they have any questions on the task before the workshop launch.



Postcard produced by participants to represent the many languages of Prato and advertise the exhibition.

Lessons Learnt

In *La Nostra Prato* the media training session was split between the introductory session and the start of Day 2. Doing so prevented us from offering in-depth training to participants and from consolidating their skills through hands-on activities. Therefore, we recommend dedicating a full day to this activity before the start of the workshops.

DAY 0 – REVIEWING PLANS

Before the start of the workshops meet with your team to discuss the results of the pre-workshop activities and fine-tune the logistics. This activity will allow you to make necessary adjustments to match the overall rhythm and content of the workshops to the background, knowledge and aspirations of participants. adjusting the overall rhythm of activities to their needs.

The exercise is to immerse yourselves in the day by day activities and try to understand if the workshop concept was fluid enough, convincing enough, and suitable for participants. In our case, one of the most interesting outcomes was the decision to print a series of large-scale A1 maps and use them collaboratively during the day 1 focus groups.

This is also a good time to divide urban explorers in groups, using the information you collected in the pre-workshop questionnaires. These are the criteria that we adopted in our project:

- Focus groups should not be larger than 10 participants. Each focus group will then be divided in two smaller team of 4/5 urban explorers for the creative missions;
- Groups should be as linguistically diverse as possible, including a gender balanced mix of participants that can speak different languages. This will allow each team to engage with different aspects of the linguistic landscape of the city;
- If possible, avoid assigning participants who know each other (same school, friends, etc...) to the same group. Getting to know new people and learning to work collaboratively is a key educational outcome of the workshops;
- Keep in mind the different skills of each explorer. Assigning all the participants who are already familiar with photography or videography to the same group will inevitably lead to a lack of balance in the creative output.

While the process of assigning participants to groups using all these variables can be time consuming, we found out that it helped immensely in running the focus groups and the creative missions.

Lessons Learnt

Day 0 saw us scaling down some of the work planned for Day 1. After immersing ourselves in the activities we realized that we had included too many questions in each focus group. We thus decided to strip down the structure to leave more space for discussion of key questions.

DAY 1 – FOCUS GROUPS

I have learnt that, even if you are small, you can have your voice heard if you believe in it.
Darla – Urban Explorer

What will remain with me of this project is the friendship with students from other high-schools and with the research team.
Melissa – Urban Explorer

In the first day of workshops the research team met with all the urban explorers for the first time. We kicked things off by welcoming everyone and introducing the workshop structure and objectives. This is where you can briefly go over the main requirements of the workshop, explaining structure, schedule and objectives. This is also a good time to ensure that all participants have signed the required consent forms.

Once you have clarified the key information and answered any questions raised by participants split them in the working groups for an ice-breaker activity. Using the video, they produced on their favourite place participants should introduce themselves to the rest of the group, explaining why they chose that place and why they decided to represent it the way they did. Make sure to guide and facilitate the discussion, highlighting points in common between participants, asking them to reflect on differences that might emerge, whether they are all familiar with the places discussed and overall providing positive feedback to their creative work. You can use an A1 printed map to generate a participatory map of their favourite places that facilitates the discussion. Remember, this is supposed to be an inspiring and hands-on activity to engage students with the work you will be carrying out over the rest of the week so stress that the project is about them and that they are in charge of how it will unfold.

Once participants have had a chance to meet each other and showcase their first creative output, reconvene for a plenary session, where different members of the team will address the following key aspects of the project:

- **Ethics of participation and co-design principles.** Spend some time clarifying the roles that you and the participants will be playing and explaining how your participatory intervention is a process built on inclusiveness, empowerment, equal relationships and shared responsibility. Since some participants might not have worked in such a way before it is crucial to address the principles that will guide everyone’s work over the following days.
- **Background information and research.** This is where you can share with participants the key findings of the research conducted when setting up the project. Content will vary depending on your overall objectives, but it is a good idea to focus your presentation on positive aspects that are engaging for your audience and can motivate and give them a head start for the focus groups you are about to run. In our case we focused on key data on multicultural youth in Prato, on the historical network of transnational connections that has made the city what it is today, and on the power of creative interventions in making youth voices heard.
- **Technical information and requirements.** While there will be time to discuss this throughout the workshop and you have already addressed this in the media training session, it is important to ensure that all participants are on the same page in relation to the digital storytelling component. In our case this involved answering additional questions on how to use our interactive map for content upload, introducing other technical requirements and ensuring that all participants had downloaded and had access to the required software.

Once the plenary session is over, divide participants for the focus groups. These were organised in three blocks, with members of the research team rotating across groups between blocks to ensure that all groups would work with all members of the team.

Block 1 – Moving in the city

This focus group builds on pre-workshop activities to explore the personal relation of participants with the city, the areas that they spend most time in and the ones they like the most. You can use this focus to start understanding if and how participants move across transcultural areas and whether or not they perceive differences between different areas of town. Using printed A3 maps, pens and colour markers, participants were asked to work in groups on the following questions.

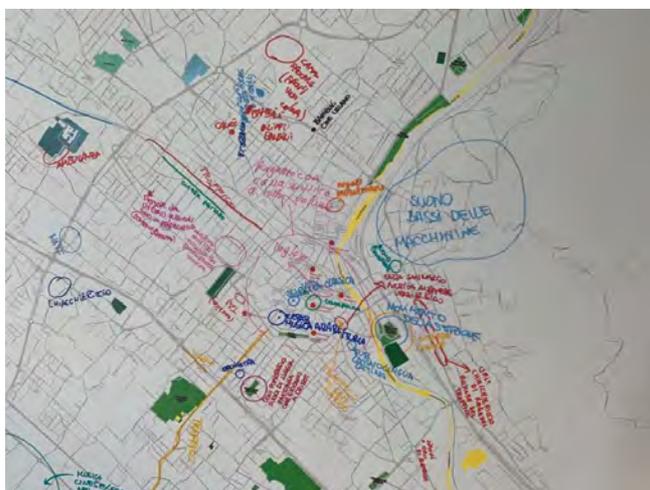
- Where do you catch up with your friends?
- Where do you go if you want to get noticed/be seen?
- When on a date with your boyfriend/girlfriend where you take him/her?
- Where do you go if you want to be on your own?
- To what places have you given a name?
- Where do you do sports? Where do you play?

Throughout the discussion you can use materials collected during your initial research to provide additional inputs for reflection and exchange. In our case we used historical pictures of spaces of encounter, historical pictures of street writing, photos and info on local transcultural events.

Block 2 – Senses and the city

This focus group draws on participants' lived experience to build sensorial maps of the city, focusing on its multilingual and multicultural landscape. Assign one of the different senses to each A1 map (sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch) and distribute them across groups. Maps will rotate across groups so that by the end you will have 5 maps with the contributions of all participants. The discussion and participatory mapping activity unfold in free form but you can redirect if needed by asking questions such as:

- Where do you hear music in other languages?
- Where do you eat food from other countries and cultures?
- Where do you hear/see different languages?
- Have you ever been to cultural events like the Chinese New Year celebrations?



One of the sensorial maps produced by participants

When the maps are completed post them on one of the walls of the venue you are working in. You can then open the floor to a public discussion, asking participants to walk you through each one as local guides.

Block 3 – Re-imagining the city

This focus groups explores dimensions of belonging, transculturality and reclamation of space that are linked to aspects like memories/aspirations/desires/cultural influences through various media forms. The activity is centred of the connections that participants might feel with places outside of their own city, their desires to add or remove elements to it, the fascination that they might have for other countries, regions and cities. Working collectively on A1 maps as in the previous activity ask participants the following questions:

- What would you add to your city?
- What would you remove from it?
- What are the places in your city that make you feel like you are elsewhere?

- What are the places in your city that make you feel at home?

When maps are completed post them on a wall next to the sensorial maps and lead a group discussion to explore them with participants.



Plenary discussion of the maps with participants

Lessons Learnt

In our project we kicked off Day 1 with a longer plenary session. Towards the end of the day we realized that many participants were getting very tired. Our debrief session highlighted how starting with a hands-on icebreaker activity would have been a better idea. Given the intensive nature of the workshop it is important to maintain a good rhythm throughout. Avoid long lectures and explanations and privilege activities that require everyone's active participation.

On day one a small group of participants, particularly interested in graphics and design, asked permission to join our design team, working on the visuals and the website of the project, and they started to form a new collaborative process. While this was not originally planned until day 4 the design team decided to welcome the participants: in the following days, they helped them to elaborate visual concepts for the cards and the panels of the exhibit, which were actually printed and used as the visual identity of the project. Being flexible and open to participants' suggestion is a key pillar of our methodology and your initial plans should not get in the way of participants' proposals and desires if these can contribute to the overall success of the project.

DAY 2 – FIRST MISSION

This experience enriched me because I came in contact with many other cultures. I have learnt to observe my city from other points of view and I discovered new places in areas that I cross daily.
Greta – Urban Explorer

Thanks to this project I discovered areas of Prato that I did not know about and I was able to capture new details that before were not important for me.
Elisabetta – Urban Explorer

Kick-off the second day of workshops by dividing participants into smaller groups. These will be the creative teams that will work together today and tomorrow so keep in mind participants skills and interests when doing so.

Once this is done hand out the equipment and consent forms that participants will be using and ask them to check that everything is in working order. We used smartphone gimbals, directional microphones and lavalier microphones, assigning them to each group. To map the creative outputs on a digital map we utilised a platform for ubiquitous publishing developed for the project. If a similar software solution is not available remind participants to enable geotagging on their smartphone. You can then use free software like GeoSetter to export the creative output on a digital map and on Google Earth.

Explain to participant what the relevant privacy legislation is when taking pictures or videos of passer-by and remind them to ask the people they will be engaging with to sign a consent form if needed. Some quick tips on how to approach people, explain the project and conduct quick interviews are also going to be very helpful.

Once everyone is familiar with the equipment they will be using hand out the instructions for the first creative mission: exploring the city through their senses.

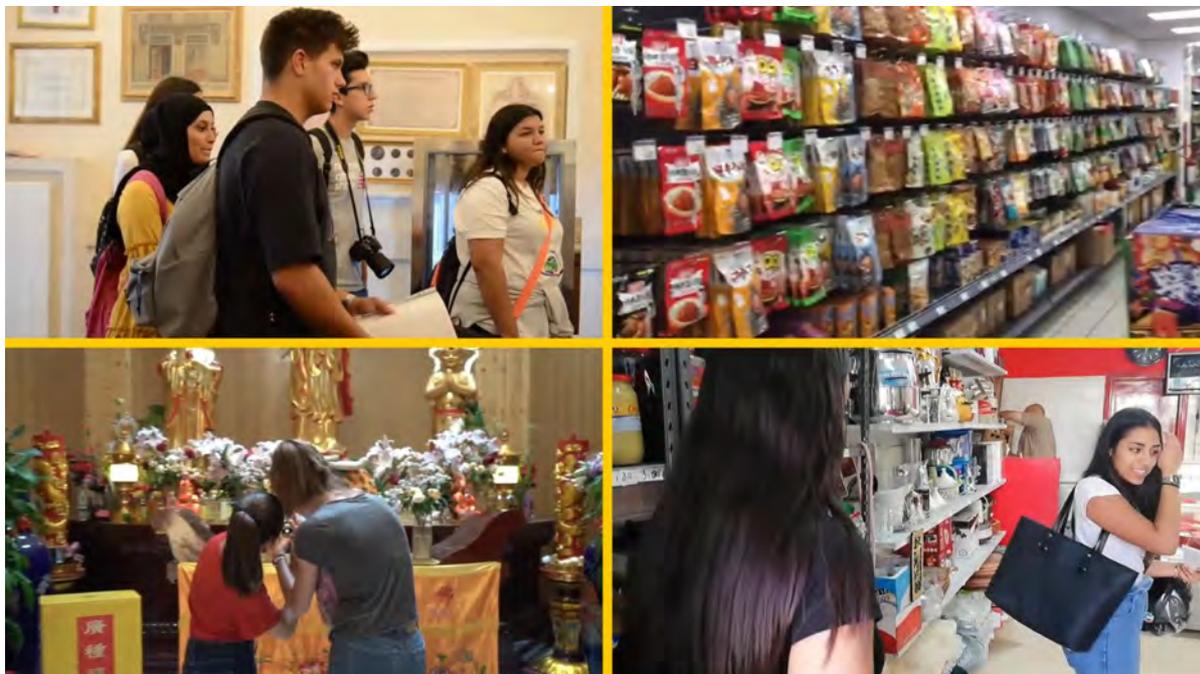
Start by assigning each group to a different part/neighbourhood of the city. You might want to select areas that are closer to the venue if time is a concern.

The first mission's objective is to change the way in which participants interact with their lived urban environment, encouraging them to experiment with new ways of exploring, feeling, reading and interpreting the city. To stimulate this process, participants are asked to provide a photo, video or sound recording for one or more of the categories you have designed for each sense. In our pilot project we used the following:

- Sight: Signs and billboards in different languages, stickers and graffiti, distinctive looks/styles of passer-by.
- Taste: Food that you never eat.
- Hearing: Sounds that make you sad, sounds that make you happy, sounds of other languages.
- Smell: Smells that take you elsewhere, smells that take you home.
- Multisensorial: One place that stimulates many senses at the same time.

Remind participants that the mission is not about producing high-quality photos and videos for the exhibition, but rather about engaging differently with familiar spaces and discovering new and unfamiliar places through their own senses. To facilitate this act of urban exploration provide participants with printed maps of the areas that were assigned to each group. Ask students to spend some time to plan out their exploration path on the map by reflecting together on the different categories you provided them with.

Once they have done so, inform them that they will need to leave the map behind and let themselves be guided by sounds, smells, sights and suggestions. You can explain this approach in more detail by introducing them to the figure and history of the *urban flaneur*, who in the words of photographer Jan Halle, acts as an observer “roaming the streets seemingly without aim, absorbed in the moment and the experience of being in a place”.



Participants explore Prato through their senses during Day 2

Once all is clear and participants have had a chance to ask questions, have them test the equipment by taking a picture, recording an audio clip and shooting a brief video. Since you will not be joining participants in this activity remind them that they contact you at any time at the phone number you provided.

While participants are out exploring the city, you can run your daily team debrief session and rest a bit before starting the set up for the next day.

Lessons Learnt

While the results of the first missions were satisfying for team members and participants, our instructions could have been clearer. The focus on exploration of the mission was lost to some of the participants, who instead approached it as a treasure hunt. Ensure to spend enough time clarifying the objectives of each mission and stress the importance of process over results. We did so for the following mission and the improvement was immediately visible.

DAY 3 – SECOND MISSION

I have learnt that we take many things for granted. We often stop at the surface and do not truly engage with what surrounds us.

Claudia – Urban Explorer

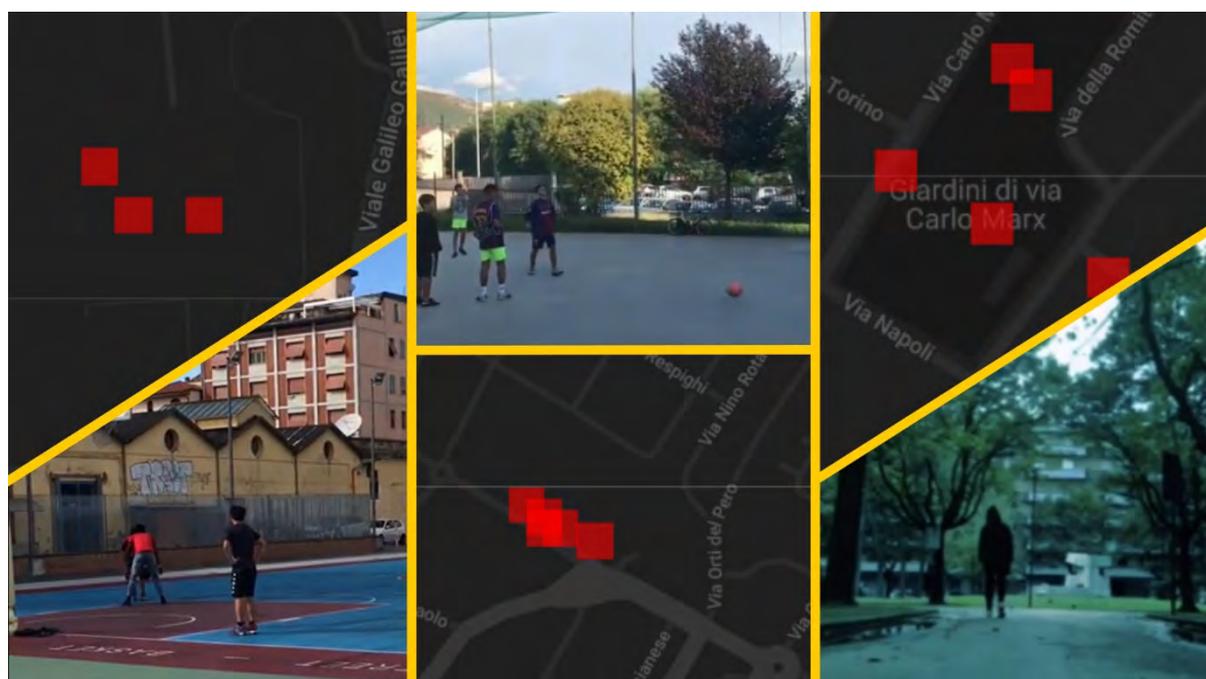
Day 3 starts with the collection of the materials produced during the first creative mission. Make sure that you have enough laptops and connection cables to quickly download all photos, videos and sound recordings.

While you are downloading materials run a debriefing activity with participants to get additional insights into how things went and to address any question they might have. Start by showing each group the map with the path they had originally envisioned for the first mission. Ask them whether or not they followed the original path. What have they learnt? What new places have they discovered? What issues did they face? How can they address them? Is there anything they would do differently? Throughout this debrief act as a mediator and attempt to stimulate a creative dialogue between participants. Your objective should be that of allowing students to learn from each other and provide answers yourself only when required.

Once this is done hand-out the instructions for the second mission. Today, participants will be using their own emotions to explore the city and produce an emotional mapping of it.

We chose to have participants work on rage, disgust, sadness, joy, surprise and fear, asking them to reflect for some time on the following questions within their group:

- What places make you feel these emotions?
- Do you belong to those places?
- Can you occupy/negotiate/transform them through artistic works and performances? Do young people have a voice?



Surprise, joy and fear in three digital stories produced by participants

Each group is then asked to connect each of these emotions to a specific place in the city, and to record an explanation or personal memory related to that emotion. Creating a storyboard, urban explorers can start discussing how to best visualise their emotions. They can then set out to capture pictures or videos to represent the place and the emotion they associate to it. The personal memory needs to be recorded as a separate audio file and transcribed as a text file. Doing so will facilitate the organisation of materials for the exhibition.

Once the instructions are clear for everyone remind participants to turn on geotagging and that they can get in touch with you if needed. Then send them out to reclaim their city through their own personal stories and emotions.

Lessons Learnt

Collecting materials from the mission can be time consuming if you do not set up a clear workflow. It is crucial to clarify to each group what they need to hand in and how. Printing out a set of instructions and handing them to each group will allow them to organize and prepare materials themselves on a USB stick, saving time for the preparatory work for the missions and exhibition.

Spend enough time clarifying what you mean with each emotion and discuss this with participants in groups. For some explorers the boundaries between rage, disgust and fear were difficult to navigate individually and your presence as a mediator can make the difference in the preparatory work for the mission.

Print out a storyboard with clear indications on how to approach the narrative construction of the digital stories. Participants were able to do this themselves but giving them a tighter structure to work on will make their job easier.

DAY 4 – ORGANISING THE EXHIBITION

I have learnt to watch more carefully the places that surround me and to pay attention to details that I often miss in my daily life. I have also learnt that unity is strength.

Joana – Urban Explorer

The next two days will be spent organising the project’s exhibition with participants. Start off the day by collecting the creative materials that each group has produced the day before. Check the quality of sound recordings with them and if needed ask them to record them again. Once all the outputs have been transferred and organised is time to get started organising the public pop-up exhibition.

The event will need to be entirely organised and run by participants. To do so we are splitting up participants from the original groups and asking them to join one of the following teams:

Communication: This team will work with one member of the research group to set up the social media communication strategy, write and disseminate the official media release and reach out to local media and radios to advertise the exhibition.

Curators: Multiple teams who will be in charge of selecting the creative outputs that will be exhibited in the event. This will vary depending on the kind of media you decided to focus on. In our case we had separate sub-teams working on the photos, videos, creation of interactive installations and creative use of the maps produced during day 1.

- **Photos and exhibition design:** This team curated the selection of images that were exhibited. They organised them in sections by topics, created titles and description for them and decided how to display them.
- **Multi-screen video installation:** This team turned the videos and audio recordings produced by participants into a multi-screen video installation. They selected materials, helped editing them together and took care of the technical installation.
- **Maps:** This team analysed the maps produced by all participants on Day 1 and turned them into creative booklets. They analysed and grouped information in categories to create data visualisations that could guide visitors through each question explored in the workshop.
- **Interactive installations:** This team created the interactive installations where the public could actively engage with the theme of the exhibition. Visitors could help define what Prato is for them by adding words to a multilingual word-cloud that was posted on a wall and use post its on two A1 maps to share what they wish to add to and remove from their city.



The photos and exhibition design team selects images for the exhibition

Public Speaking: Participants who will introduce the event to the public during the launch and act as guides for visitors.

Visual Design: This team is in charge of designing and preparing postcards, flyers, promotional materials and info plaques for the exhibition.

Assigning clear roles within each team will also facilitate operations. Members of the research team will need to be more present in this phase and act as mentors and logistic support but the creative process should be entirely handled by participants.

Lessons Learnt

Ensure to have enough participants for each team. If you notice that a team has too many explorers ask them if they are happy to join another team who might instead need help.

Since all teams will need to work closely with each other ask students to elect a liaison officer who will coordinate work with other groups.

DAY 5 – SETTING UP

I loved how we all had our role and they were all important. Every one of us was essential to the success of the exhibition.

Pietro – Urban Explorer

Thanks to this project I worked with other young people and shared my emotions with them. I am proud of the work we did. It was worth it.

Edoardo – Urban Explorer

This is when you can start setting up the exhibition space and rehearse for the launch. Use some time at the start of the day to finish off tasks that might have been left behind from the previous day and then move on to logistics. Ensure to have all the materials you need to set up the venue and have students check that all the creative outputs they selected are ready. Layout and content will vary depending on the kind of activity you run and on the space available but remember to let participants decide what the best way to design the experience is for them.

Interaction across the different teams is essential in this moment and members of the research team should act as mediators between the different voices and visions to ensure that everyone has a say.

Once everything is ready and set up is the time to run through the last things that everyone can do to bring more people to the exhibition. Have the communication team lead this session and check with every participant who they have contacted and how. As we learnt from our first project there is always time for a last-minute call to the mayor if somebody's parent has a sixth degree of connection to her/him.

Make sure that everyone gets some rest and is ready for the final day.

Lessons Learnt

Do not hesitate to move participants to different groups if needed. Setting up the exhibition space is an intense creative moment and it is important for all explorers to share it even if they were not originally assigned to cutting pictures, hanging images or helping test audio equipment.

As a member of the research team you will need to be highly visible and take charge of any practical or technical issue that might arise. Do not hesitate to step in to help as needed and act to resolve any disagreement that might arise.

DAY 6 – RUNNING THE EXHIBITION

The reasons why we decided to join the project are numerous. With this work we wanted to take back Prato, not just in a physical sense, but in a moral sense, through our own perspectives and imagination. We are the youth and Prato will be ours in the future, so we have a right to express ourselves because we exist. Often no one asks for our opinions, except in instances like the “Fridays for Future” rally. This is why we worked together and on equal ground, learning not to be strangers in our own city.

Exhibition Press Release written by workshop participants.

By now you should have realised that this is participants’ time to shine. Take the back seat and let them reclaim their city through their own voices and artworks. While you might have to give a brief speech during the launch make sure that participants are the first on the floor and the last to leave. Introduce participants to local community representatives, spend some time speaking with their families and friends and otherwise make yourself available in case of need.



The interactive artwork created by students to allow visitors of the exhibition to add and remove things from their city, building the futures of Prato collectively.

FOLLOW UP

What comes after the workshop ends will change depending on how you plan on making the materials produced by participants available to the wider public. This could vary from a simple webpage where the images and videos are collected, to an interactive digital storytelling experience like the one we designed with [La Nostra Prato](#), from an interactive map to a virtual exhibition space.

Before you move on to this activity though here are a few final tips on follow up activities that we found useful in our experience:

- Prepare an online evaluation form before the start of the workshops and ask participants to complete it soon after the end of the exhibition. Keep it fast and simple through linear scale and multichoice questions, but include also open long-answer fields where they can express their feedback.
- Involve workshop participants in project dissemination activities. Stay in touch with the young creators who made your project a success and inform them of new updates on the project. Whenever possible invite them to speak at public presentations on the project, involve them in interviews and in other media engagement activities. If this is not possible, make sure to foreground their voices in your own presentations through their recordings, videos and images.

Lessons Learnt

Prepare online evaluation forms ahead of the workshops and modify them if needed on Day 6. It is very important to send these out as soon as possible after the exhibition to take advantage of the energy you created and involve as many explorers as possible in the evaluation process.

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CONTACT

Youth in the City is a participatory action research initiative led by Monash University, Australia. Our aim is to create an open and replicable interdisciplinary framework for the development of digital and participatory projects with migrant youth around the world.

Each project will see the participation of different teams according to the specific locations and aims of the project; we are keen to collaborate with academics, artists and designers around the world. For further information and initial contacts, visit our website youthinthecity

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