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BIODIVERCITIES

DIGEST #2: JAN 2021 - MAR 2021

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MAKING SENSE OF THE 'DIGITAL'

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With the 'new normal' increasingly resembling a *Black Mirror* episode and the landscape of today's socio-political life being increasingly 'digitalized', practitioners and institutions are expected to make sense of opportunities and challenges related to the 'digital turn'. This is particularly relevant for citizen engagement, as the culture of social distancing enforced by the pandemic has altered the ways public participation, whether invited or un-invited, can happen. With many processes forced to move online, important questions about equality (e.g. digital divide) and power dynamics arise, which shows that the transfer to e-democracy is not only a technical but also a political issue.

Notwithstanding the limitations, certain things can be done. This Digest focuses on what is possible, being mindful that technical sophistication and know-how ('how to engage') is not a substitution for the clarification of ends ('why to engage'). In other words, the question that's on everyone's mind - 'how can citizens be best engaged online or by means of digital technologies?' - goes hand-in-hand with 'what is the purpose of the engagement process itself?'. Citizen engagement is not about making a perfect event nor entertaining the public. The activities you are designing are part of a collective process of change pivoting around key issues and questions.

UPCOMING

WORKSHOPS

- March - Biodiversity mapping
- April - Spaces of citizen engagement
- June - Ecosystem health and ethics
- June - Urban agriculture

START OF THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

- We'd like to hear how the 1st activity went and are available for a coaching meeting.
- Expectations and promises made to citizens must be clarified before the activities start. Should you wish, send us the invitation so that we can provide some input.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN DESIGNING AN ONLINE EVENT

THEORIES OF FACILITATION

Select a **theoretical framework that will provide a guidance structure** for the meeting for a more focused, dynamic and productive experience.

As an example, you can consider:
- the ORID approach;
- the U-Theory.

CHOREOGRAPHY

Beforehand, and depending on your role, write down the choreography of the meeting. This helps reminding you of the different steps and will make it **easier for tech host to support you**.

TOOLS

Which tools or combination of tools is instrumental in achieving your purpose?

Test your tools beforehand and **have a plan B** (what happens if?)

PURPOSE

This is the cornerstone of any event.
Take time to define the purpose and objective.

AGENDA

Time is experienced differently in online meetings. Remember:

- Aim for **shorter meetings**;
- Schedule short recurrent breaks;
- Factor in extra time for technicalities (e.g. sharing screen, switching between tools, etc.);
- If you have to adapt the agenda of an offline activity into an online format, consider reducing the duration and spreading the event into multiple sessions.
- Make room for some **counter-planning** - participants might want to change the agenda!

HOSTING TEAM

Ensure you define roles beforehand:

- **Process host** - this person moderates and facilitates the meeting;
- **Tech host** and, when possible, **back-up** tech support - this person is responsible for all the technicalities.

Set a separate communication channel with the hosting team to adjust the flow, comment and address potential tech issues.

PREPARATION AND FOLLOW-UP OF ONLINE EVENTS
don't forget about what happens before and after

INVITATION

Make sure that participants understand why the meeting is taking place and why they are invited. The invitation should clearly state what the organiser expects and what the participant should expect during the process and as a follow-up.

REPORT

Take time to write minutes and highlights of the meeting. Share them with participants through an editable document, allowing them to make comments and add things that might be missing.

FOLLOW-UP

As the meeting is part of a process, make sure to communicate the next phases: Have the decisions and ideas been communicated and to whom? What was the reaction? Will there be other events?

INDIVIDUAL PREPARATION FOR A COLLECTIVE CONVERSATION

You can ask participants to prepare for the meeting by bringing photos, materials, objects, preparing maps or drawings, going for a walk in the area that will be discussed and paying attention to their thoughts, emotions and perceptions.

DEBRIEF

Analyse and evaluate the meeting with your team. What can be improved?

WELCOME

Frame the meeting and share housekeeping rules:

- Use of microphone and camera (NB. for big meetings muting everyone is advisable);
- Rules of interaction - hand raise and/or chat;

Other information: e.g. always inform if the meeting will be recorded and state the uses of the recording in compliance with GDPR rules.

CHECK IN

Ask the participants about their reasons for joining the meeting to connect them with the purpose of the event.

When possible, allow participants to introduce themselves by doing a round of table.

ICEBREAKER

Take time to make participants feel comfortable and safe through a warm-up creative discussion or activity. It doesn't have to be all about talking - ask participants to bring objects that in some way relate to the topic under discussion. Ask them to describe those, tell a story, show how they work.

BRAINSTROMING

Use tools that help foster collective conversations: break-out rooms, whiteboards to collect ideas, sharable documents, and online polls.

During discussions in breakout rooms make sure there is always a facilitator and a rapporteur. You can select these from among the participants.

CHECK OUT

Reserve time before the end to allow participants to share main takeaways and define next steps. Ask them what they thought about the meeting - was anything important missing?

RUNNING AN EVENT

Ground rules: **respect**, **conviviality**, **openness**. Remember to listen closely, sense the experience, and connect to individual needs while enhancing the collective stance. Last but not least: have fun!

I am here because...
I want to learn how to engage various social groups online.
engage myselfe in a mapping process
get ideas about engaging
curiosity
learn something new
get familiar with digital tools
I hope to get new ideas
I want to learn something new :)
I want to learn something new

A map for me is....

Magic

Is a space to know my territory and all the history

a dataset

a focused interpretation of reality

a fundamental tool

visualisation & tells a story and opportunities

beautiful

very important

best visualisation

What could be a collective outcome?

B|O Group 1
Geographic comparison of different experiences
♥ 6

B|O Group 1
A metric system of measuring citizen engagement
♥ 10

B|O Group 1
Report of successes and challnages in citizen engagement
♥ 9

B|O Group 2
A sort of Atlas of maps that show how people are valuing nature.
♥ 10

B|O Group 3
Outcome is a movie where different experiences are collected
♥ 10

B|O Group 3
Outcome is a process of sharing information and creating a community around a shared 'object'
♥ 4