

Creation of a Common Territory

Reflexion on Territory and Identity in the Pinhole Workshops The UniLiege Local Case Study (PDF)

We work with a community of socio-cultural actors and artists from the region of Liege, Belgium, who ground their practice in visual arts (painting, sculpting, photography, audiovisual productions).

We particularly worked in collaboration with D. Luczak and W. Moron who organized pinhole workshops: The work aimed for a group of participants, to individually and collectively discover and tell stories about their quarter, neighbourhood, habits, living space, cultural differences by producing pinhole images and narratives.

Pinholes are rudimentary camera following the principle of a camera obscura: small boxes pierced by a very little hole that allows light to come inside, they capture the reality just like the eyes do. On the surface that is opposed to the hole, an inverted image of the subject is formed and captured by a photo-sensible paper (such as photographic paper). A computer program can then be used to turn the negative print obtained to the final photo.

During the workshops participants were invited to build their own pinhole camera, observe their environments, explore their ideas, shoot, develop the photographs and to create narratives on the issue of Territory and Identity. These activities were characterized by important sharing moments at all steps and led to the production of artistic creations: photos and narratives.

The artistic creations have been part of an exhibition in the frame of the 6th International photography biennale in Liege (“Territories” – February-March 2008) under the title of “Territories and Identities”. [http://www.biennalephotoliege.be /](http://www.biennalephotoliege.be/)

The oeuvres were exhibited for two months. Participants were empowered to exhibit their oeuvres side by side with recognized artists. The exhibition was designed in order for each of the participating groups to have a dedicated space. The photographs were also assembled into a collective fresco within the form of a tree in order to symbolize the relationships of men in their territory. Finally, the photos and narratives were compiled in books regrouping the productions of several workshops.

This initiative has lasted for more than two years in our city and has involved more than 400 participants who came through various institutions: primary and secondary schools, public centre of social security, refugees centre, employment applicants centre, etc.

THE FIELDWORK The pinholes workshops generated a lot of events and initiatives and gave us a very creative framework on which to rely our case study. Several encounters with their organizers allowed us to understand their objectives and the impact they are trying to reach. Within this case study we focus our analysis more specifically on the Observation of 4 pinhole workshops organized from February 2007 to January 2008 and Interviews with participants, and our participation to the exhibition (February-March 2008). Beside this, our investigation on intergenerational learning was nurtured by focus groups and discussions with a larger group of socio-cultural actors more specifically through the Organization of 4 co-design sessions with representatives of the different associations composing the visual art community

THE KEY OUTCOMES

The benefits and learning outcomes of the pinhole experience

The pinhole experience creates exchange opportunities between juniors and seniors. It promotes personal development and social intergenerational bond since it:

- Fosters fruitful interactions between young and old persons, which develop a better knowledge of each other and feeling of being part of the same community. It also promotes expression of each individual, youngsters as well as older people, as equally valuable member of the community. It gives the same weight to all participants’ opinion and productions, and empowers them, which give them pride and self-worth feelings.
- Elicits reflection about the common environment and fosters new positive relationships to the community space. It (re) connects youngsters and elders to their local environment, which is a first step for them to involve and feel included in the community life.

The role of the pinhole camera

The pinhole camera acts as a support of these elements thanks to the following properties:

- The pinhole is a mobile tool which allows physical discovery of the neighbourhood
- The pinhole is simple to use and leads to valuable results People are implied in the different steps leading from the camera to the photography (building the camera, developing the photo, etc), so that they feel empowered and responsible for the results. The pinhole allows for externalization: it produces external results (photos) that can be shared

and discussed among the participants. The pinhole is a semiotic artefact: it leads the participants to produce and share meaning about themselves, about their representations and emotions, and about their environment.

Technology-enhanced IGL environments

Based on these observations, we formulate recommendations for the design of technology-enhanced IGL environments. They should:

- Elicit rich interactions between groups from different ages, where the expression of each is equally valued, and the mutual contribution of juniors and seniors is elicited.
- Propose themes and activities that are convenient for any audience so that juniors and seniors can experience the flow.
- Allow "externalization" and "responsabilization", so that it develops self-esteem and feeling of self-worth for each individual.
- Offer a chance for exploring the physical spaces, so that participants can discover their environment and associate it with positive "experiences-in-place".
- Employ technological tools that support these orientations: be simple to use so that interacting with it is a comfortable, joyful and prideful experience for juniors and seniors, be mobile so that places can be physically appreciated, allow the production of external results, lead the users to interact and to share meaning.