



2 ALTER-PLACES PANELS AS PART OF TEH 97 CONFERENCE 'ARTS OF SURVIVAL'

at Aparaaditehas (Tartu, Estonia)

May 31 2024

The first conference of the Alter-Places project, coordinated by our partner IZOLYATSIA (Ukraine) and our expert from Canada Long Winter, was initially planned to take place online due to the ongoing political and military situation in Ukraine. However, at the same time, one of the project's partners, Trans Europe Halles, was hosting one of its annual conferences in Tartu, Estonia, under the theme "Arts of Survival."

Seizing this opportunity, the project team decided to reshape the original online conference into two panel sessions integrated into the Tartu event. This shift allowed for the first in-person gathering of all project partners, an important step in fostering group cohesion and building the foundations for effective collaboration.

By embedding the Alter-Places discussions within the broader Arts of Survival theme, the project naturally intersected with critical reflections on sustainability. In this context, sustainability is not only approached from an ecological standpoint, but also as a cultural and social imperative, a matter of resilience, adaptation, and long-term viability for independent cultural spaces, particularly in times of crisis. Framed as an "art of survival," sustainability becomes both a practice and a mindset, enabling cultural actors to rethink their infrastructures, relationships, and ways of inhabiting spaces.

The 2 Panels initiated by Alter-Places project are:

**CULTURE AND CARE : rebuilding alternative
cultural places & ourselves**

**ALTERNATIVE CULTURE PLACES UNDER
CRISIS: resilience, renewal and challenges**





CULTURE AND CARE :

Rebuilding Alternative Cultural Places & Ourselves

Panel #1

May 31 2024 / 11:45 am - 1:15 pm

As urban landscapes embody a series of injustices (displacement, gentrification, marginalization, ...), alternative cultural places (ACP) have diversified their action, extending beyond the cultural sector, to contemporary forms of solidarity. These renewed practices and somewhat undisciplined paths are developed by ACPs communities to open their spaces and inhabit them with new sets of competences focusing on care, transmission, pedagogy, co-creation, and any form fostering and welcoming diversity of expression and selves. However, ACPs are faced with tensions, backlash movements, official censorship as well as hidden forms of self-censorship. Our panel will explore some of ACPs' strategies and challenges associated with such transformations and issues, including work organization, alliances, censorship, instrumentalization – as well as the space for hope cultural spaces and communities can nurture in a contemporary urban environment.

Moderator: Laura Aufrère - La Main (France)

Speakers:

_Anastasiia Ponomareva - Urban Curators Agency (Ukraine)
_Anastasiia Gulak - IZYUM_Recovery (Ukraine)
_Amy Gottung - DIY Space Project (Canada)
_Louna Sbou - Oyouun (Germany)
_Olivier Le Gal - La Station - Gare des Mines (France)
_Casey Wel - Artist and researcher (USA)

Emergent themes: shared practices, tensions

TENSION: between urgency and sustainability

Architect (Ukraine) - Anastasia Gulak:

*“Of course, residents always say they want to have these sustainable changes (green hydrogen, solar panel roofs, car-free quarters), but [at the same time, they may be saying]: ‘we have a hole in our roof, we have a hole in our walls, our canalization does not work.’ So there are sometimes **other issues which we need to [address] immediately.**”*

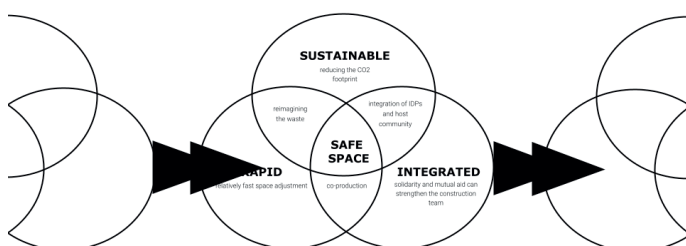
*“It [can be] **better to [approach change] slowly**, when we have time for a slow walk and communication with our neighbours. It’s important to build trust with community, and to keep the trust, because people [are vulnerable in times of crisis] and if you speak about [a possibility of] reconstruction, **they will want to believe that it will happen immediately.**”*

Architect (Ukraine) - Anastasia Ponomareva:

*“**People hesitate to flee from cities under siege, [depending on what they understand their options to be] for housing.** After the first consideration of an ability to escape safely [...] very often the second question [potential evacuees] will ask themselves is whether there will be available space or not [...] **Recent evacuation processes in the Kharkiv region resulted in 7,000 people refusing to be officially evacuated because they [didn’t] know where they would be moved.**”*

*“We are aware of this huge amount of work we need to do, but **we don’t want to [be overwhelmed by challenges] and [...] not act.** Because people need spaces [to survive.] And we need to manage this rapidly.”*

CO-HATY principles



PANELISTS PRESENTATION

Anastasia Ponomareva

Co-founder of Urban Curators and the CO-HATY project in Ukraine, Anastasia works at the intersection of art, architecture, and community development. CO-HATY creates housing solutions for internally displaced people, combining urban expertise, local partnerships, and sustainable retrofitting.

Anastasia Gulak

Architect and strategist, Anastasia is the curator of IZYUM_recovery, a project envisioning the sustainable reconstruction of a war-damaged residential area in Izyum. Her work rethinks urban living through ecological and human-centered approaches.

Louna Shou

Cultural producer and director of Oyouin in Berlin, Louna curates from queer-feminist, decolonial, and class-conscious perspectives. With projects spanning Rwanda to Lebanon, her work explores alternative curatorship, collective practices, and cultural resistance.

Olivier Le Gal

Founder of Collectif MU, Olivier creates immersive audiovisual experiences and curates artistic programs in sound, art, and cinema. He also directs La Station – Gare des Mines, a third-space for emerging arts and sonic experimentation in Paris.

Casey Wei

Artist and filmmaker based in Vancouver, Casey blends performance, music, and publishing. She co-edits Relssue magazine and programs for the Vancouver International Film Festival. Her PhD research explores the history of communes in Maoist China and North America.

PRACTICE: providing humanitarian support to neighbours in need

Underlying the development of many ACPs is an implicit practice of responding to need or opportunity – through any means available, with or without permission. Such efficient and self-sufficient behaviour means that these communities are often the first to provide solutions to problems, on the ground.

LA STATION (Paris, France) - Olivier Legal:

“Our first action was to open a water supply, just to allow neighbouring refugee camps access to water, because the city of Paris closed some fountains around that time [due to “maintenance”]. **When we opened that water supply, a lot of people gathered around our place.** The whole start of those camps was because we opened that supply. Shortly after, we became a kind of logistic base for some NGOs distributing food to these refugees.”

Collaborating to build trust and connection: “It was not so easy also to connect with the people living in the social housing. Now we have started a new project by **opening a restaurant with neighbours who had been unemployed [for a long time].**”

“**It’s matter of empowerment,** I think. It’s also about giving people energy, who outside are being chased by police [...] It’s important that when people enter our space, they have time [to not have to think about this] and also [to be able to] organize themselves: they are talking with artists, but also among themselves. So [...] this kind of space also **builds capacity for people to act.**”

LA CASE du coucou

→ a day centre for young, isolated foreign young people living in very precarious conditions. It provides a day care centre 4 afternoons a week, **Combining psychological and social support, using a variety of therapeutic methods, including art workshops**

Rest, social interaction, meeting people, sharing skills, getting together, human warmth...



DIY SPACE PROJECT (Canada) - Amy Gottung:

“Just having these **spaces available to people who may not feel welcome elsewhere** can perform a needed service. [In addition to its role as a venue, Gallery Gachet in Vancouver] is also a space where marginalized people can come in from the streets and just hang out; they know they are welcome. There are participatory workshops and programs in addition to exhibitions, but the gallery [...] also serves as **a kind of a refuge.** In the

summer, it’s a cool place where people can get out in the heat for a while.”

OYOUN (Berlin) - Louna Sbou:

“We need spaces specifically for marginalized communities to create, to come together and **to have an exile within this hostile environment and this hostile society that we live in.**”

TENSION: political authority hindering the operations of ACPs

LA STATION (Paris) - Olivier Legal:

“**We made a day shelter [co-designed and co-constructed in collaboration with neighbour refugees..] without authorization of the mayor** of the district street in Paris. He expected me to ask him for authorization, but I didn’t. If I would have asked, maybe he would have said no.”

OYOUN (Berlin) - Louna Sbou:

As cultural spaces run by and for marginalized communities, “**we often have to navigate between being tokens and being those who are just put in place to represent a certain image.**”



“The building which we took over in 2020 in Berlin is in a working class neighborhood of Neukölln. It’s state owned. In 2019 [when the leftist party was in power ...] we had a senator looking for something that was young, radical, queer, migrant led. **We are considered a grassroots movement, because we are predominantly queer, trans, Black, Indigenous and people of colour running the space,** being in the space, creating space, hosting events, etc. **New elections came up last year, and everything changed from there. We are being evicted.** In response to our hosting a Jewish group that was offering a vigil in the space for both Palestinians, Israelis, and everyone else, the organization’s funding was cut by last December. [Our experience] seems to be

a blueprint for what may come in the future. I'm speaking of the political discourses and the developments in Berlin, Germany."

Artist and academic (Canada) - Casey Wei

"China's Bishan Commune was conceptualized as an artist utopia, but over time shifted in practice to become a rural economic revitalization project [...] **the project ended because China, being an authoritarian state, could not accept that any agent independent of the communist party was responsible for improving people's lives.**"

TENSION: between caring for community and selves

OYOUN (Berlin) - Louna Sbou

"We are predominantly a team of QT BIPOC people, and we serve QT BIPOC people: which means that we are traumatized people, dealing with traumatized people. One thing that was completely **a mass underestimation was our mental health and well-being.**"

"We introduced a life somatic code that was available for the team to cover therapy for those who cannot afford or don't have health insurance [...] We have **workshops around healing and empowerment**, particularly for the BIPOC team. When it comes to verbalizing someone's lack of well-being, I have a listening hour every week. Anyone can come, I just listen, and I don't respond necessarily unless I want to."

"But **we're not equipped or trained to respond to mental health issues** [...] There was one incident that completely blew my mind, when someone tried to commit suicide because they were completely overwhelmed by an event that took place. That's when we realized we needed to equip."

TENSION: increasing nomadism and precarious working conditions for ACPs - and other communities - globally

Architect (Ukraine) - Anastasia Gulak:

"We have **several places in Kharkiv where we can move, depending on where the bombing is active** at any given moment. For example, if [Russia] is attacking the centre of the city for many days, then we work in another district. If [they are] attacking the industrial zone, then we can work in the office in the centre."

"I think in our situation we need to start to think about speculative architecture because we have so many

empty houses. We [generally] think that every apartment in a building needs to be filled to justify its function. But perhaps [we could consider] **empty space as always ready to invite newcomers, [with the possibility of] infinite circulation through our buildings.** It's like a model of our Ukraine now because we [are constantly moving]."

PRACTICE: international network building to generate solidarity, support, and broader adaptation of sustainable practices

Architect (Ukraine) - Anastasia Gulak:

Per adapting neighbourhoods damaged in the war: "We created a **website where people can come and see the development process of a [sustainable residential] project [in order to] attract investment and stakeholders.**"

OYOUN (Berlin) - Louna Sbou:

"We've been able to kind of create this **massive international network of alternative cultural workers who are also activists.** This cultural activism [and collectivism...] builds the foundation of the room. [That's] one thing that I feel **makes it a safer space.** There are no [truly] safe spaces for most of us, but there are spaces where we can be surrounded by people that [actually] represent us."



ALTERNATIVE CULTURE PLACES UNDER CRISIS: resilience, renewal and challenges

Panel #2

May 31 2024 / 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Urban landscapes embody a series of injustices: displacement, gentrification, marginalisation and segregation. In response to that, alternative cultural places have expanded their action beyond the cultural sector to contemporary forms of solidarity. They often become beacons of hope and resilience for the local communities. Communities inhabit these spaces with new sets of competences focusing on care, transmission, pedagogy, co-creation, and any form fostering and welcoming diversity of expression and selves. However, alternative art spaces these days are facing dangerous tensions, backlash movements, official censorship as well as hidden forms of self-censorship. Our panel will explore some of the strategies and challenges associated with such transformations, including work organization, alliances, censorship, instrumentalization. We will also discuss how our centres can cultivate hope and openness in a contemporary urban environment.

Moderator: Amy Gottung - DIY Space Project (Canada)

Speakers:

_Anna Karnaukh - Lanka.pro Creative Agency (Ukraine)

_George Moroti - Gallery Gachet (Canada)

_Natassa Dourida - Communitism (Greece)

_Iain Dace - NGBG (Sweden)

Emergent themes: shared practices, tensions

PRACTICE, TENSION: the generation of ACPs
in response to crisis, as safe spaces for
marginalized communities

COMMUNITISM (Greece) - Natassa Dourida:

Communitism “was **driven by necessity**, really, and by crisis itself – be it the economic crisis of Greece or the refugee crisis. We **attracted big queer communities that did not have safe spaces** around the city. We were able to coordinate collectively.”

GALLERY GACHET (Canada) - Moroti George:

Gachet “**essentially emerged out of a mental health crisis** here in Vancouver, Canada. Gachet is located in the Downtown Eastside, which is home to a large number of Vancouver’s marginalized and dispossessed peoples. These are **primarily individuals who are Black and Indigenous, individuals who live with drug addiction and who suffer with mental health struggles**, [a crisis to which we are] losing lives every day.”

PRACTICE: Collective ownership to combat the
loss of accessible common space

COMMUNITISM (Greece) - Natassa Dourida:

“We are building a new **strategy on collective ownership**. This is part of our campaign stating that we need **to take care of the city**. We envision a city where we can take care of each other, and the buildings themselves.”

TENSION: power struggles between government
and ACPs / need for tactics

NGBG (Sweden) - Iain Dace:

“The day after Christmas I got a message from the landlord [informing us] that we have to move out in three months. Our access was blocked to the shared website that we, the City Hall and the landlords were using, and the social media accounts that they started.”

Community power, at scale, can be perceived as a threat by authorities: “They still haven’t told us why, what the problem is, but it sort of feels like they think we’re a bit too woke or I don’t know, bad? We’re trying to work out what we did wrong and we’re trying to find a way to continue. What [the City] wants us to do at

PANELISTS PRESENTATION

Olumoroti (Moroti) Soji-George

Curator, writer, and educator based in Vancouver, Moroti directs Gallery Gachet and curates for the Black Arts Centre. His work centers on inclusive, community-driven art spaces that challenge dominant narratives and uplift marginalized identities through language, archives, and cultural theory.

Iain Dace

Chair of NGBG in Malmö, Iain organizes grassroots cultural events like the NGBG Gatufest and promotes public space access through radically inclusive, sustainable, and democratic models. He leads projects like Listen and Alterplaces, exploring participatory methods and cultural sustainability.

Anna Karnaukh

Co-founder of the Ukrainian collective Lanka.pro, Anna develops cultural projects and creative economy strategies. Formerly with the British Council and EU programmes, her recent focus lies in rebuilding Ukraine’s local cultural infrastructure through systemic, ecosystem-based approaches.

Natassa Dourida

Architect and founder of Communitism, a sociocultural center reviving heritage buildings in Athens. Active in cultural policy and collective ownership research, she works on sustainable reuse models and serves on the board of Culture for Change and the Executive Committee of Trans Europe Halles.

the moment is to rip up the permits, which we sensibly already applied for last year [...] I can't stop them taking the farm away but I'm pretty sure that I can stop them taking the festival and turning it into a commercial festival rather than a community festival. **I think in a way it would have been better it had been less successful** – if I still had 4,500, 10,000, even 15,000 people attending that festival, there [may not be] the commercial incentive to kick us out the room.”



Every september since 2016, NGBG Gatufest happens on Norra Gränsbergsgatan in Malmö. NGBG is responsible for communication, content & security. City Hall provides logistics. Factories lend us land.



THEN GONE

We get an eviction notice on december 27.
Our landlord has trademarked our name.
We are blocked from shared websites and social media accounts
In april we are evicted from our premises without explanation.
The city ask us to give up our permits & denies us support.

1. What did we do wrong?
2. Can we continue without new commercial and public partners?

ISSUES: financing, access to public space, finkultur against folkkultur, freedom of speech and association, IRL, language barriers.
CRITICISMS: too diverse, too transparent, too idealistic, too changeable
STRATEGIES: Amateurism, nomadism, multiple suppliers, radical diversity, social and educational work, activism.

PRACTICE: responsive action emerging from social context (in contrast to a planned, instrumentalist strategy)

GALLERY GACHET (Canada) - Moroti George:

“A large focus for me [as a curator] has been to try and **combine lived experience in every way** that it presents itself – lived experience through theory, lived experience through practice – all while trying to engage with opportunities within the Downtown Eastside, [which I do by] curating exhibitions that speak broadly but also particularly to the states of the [neighbourhood]: to issues such as dispossession, identity, drug use and organizing within the community, but also allowing space, curating exhibitions, and creating workshops where residents of the Downtown Eastside can essentially **utilize art as a means to embody their individual agency and to visualize their collective and individual experiences in this place.**”

NGBG (Sweden) - Iain Dace:

“Basically **we don't curate.** I appreciate curation, I think

it's a good thing in most circumstances, but our policy is just to open, accept applications, build as many stages as we can get financing to do, and not really care about how good people are in the sense that if you want to play, you play; you want to paint, you paint... **We do it for the artists and not for the audiences.**”

TENSION: new and existing crises are compounded by crises of mental health, particularly for cultural communities

LANKA.PRO (Ukraine) - Anna Karnaukh:

“Every person in Ukraine goes through stress and mental health deterioration but for cultural workers it is like double because [...] you are working with] people who are going through mental health issues, but **you also have your own mental health [to deal with].**”

TENSION: agency vs. instrumentalization

COMMUNITISM (Greece) - Natassa Dourida:

“Some of us carry a **little bit of guilt that we brought gentrification to the neighbourhood**, but I don't believe that. I believe that **[gentrification] is a much more consistent plan** that has to do with Acropolis and [being a] big international capital. I think that we are just a contingency really that happened to be there. We make things more colourful but [the city] would do it anyway.”



GALLERY GACHET (Canada) - Moroti George:

“I think that **it is important sometimes to kind of use**

the systems of power and these standards they create to turn it against them [The City] is talking about giving cultural institutions [in our neighbourhood] money so that we can [...] cater to tourists, that kind of stuff and I said this is great thank you, but at the same time what does it mean for the residents of the Downtown Eastside? I was able to [use the dialogue to shed some] light into what I know is going on and how the gallery has been trying to cater to it.”

PRACTICE: maintaining a centrality (physical, geographic, social) in the fabric of a city / community

COMMUNITISM (Greece) - Natassa Dourida:

We are fighting to stay in place so as to “shape the narrative even a little bit ourselves, and **[to maintain] space in the neighbourhood that we love [and] that we feel is ours, to have agency and ownership.**”

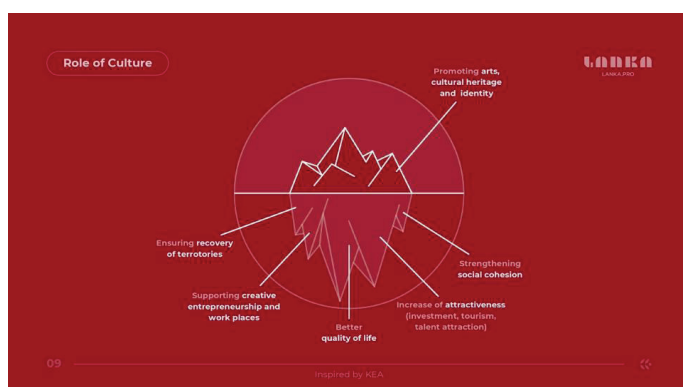
NGBG (Sweden) - Iain Dace:

Some say, “Hey man, you should come out to the countryside [...there is] less competition in the countryside and it’s true, we could rebuild the organisation somewhere else more easily, but I don’t think that’s what we want to do. I think **we have to try and stay in place as long as possible.**”

PRACTICE: As spaces embedded within and for community, ACPs can serve as important solidarity platforms, at a time when commons are increasingly disappearing, or newly needed.

LANKA.PRO (Ukraine) - Anna Karnaukh:

“When the war starts and **people gather in your space that’s a shining example that you are a [genuine] community organization.** There are hundreds of organizations in Ukraine that during the first days of the full-scale invasion by Russia became those places where people slept, were programming shows by themselves, studied online and so on.”



GALLERY GACHET (Canada) - Moroti George:

“...a lot of people here have nowhere else to go. **There are not social services that cater to the number of people in need and this is genuinely, literally their home.** There are people who have been here for longer than I have been alive, and so the idea of going away from the Downtown Eastside is out of the question [... **We have] essentially opened our doors to people and organisations in the Downtown East Side to host meetings in our space, host workshops in our space, and have a place that is a bit separate from everyone and everywhere else, where we can kind of meet and discuss and plan together and I think **this has really embedded us within the community and caused people to trust us** in a way that I don’t think they trust the other cultural institutions in the area.”**



PRACTICE: approaching cultural practice through a more socially and systemically comprehensive frame

LANKA.PRO (Ukraine) - Anna Karnaukh:

Cultural organizations “don’t often try to explain their work from a deeper perspective [for example] **how do you impact territorial development, how do you impact the well-being of your community** and your people, how do you influence entrepreneurship in your region, how do you make your territory more attractive? [...] Policy makers need **to understand [...that] culture does all this.** It’s important for us to use that language in speaking about our work, I think it can trigger many changes.”

Collaboration across sectors: “In these polycrisis times you cannot survive just by yourself. What you need to do is to really think not only about yourself and not even only about other culture centres but about **a wider ecosystem:** to consider who is there. By strengthening the sector, you strengthen yourself. **[I’m proposing] looking more holistically at different types of collaborations as opposed to just thinking about developing your organization.**”

“[...] as grantees of IZOLYATSIA, ZMINA 2.0 project [...] we brought together representatives from culture and from different sectors like business, IT and psychology to work on **solutions for improving mental health inspired by culture.**”

GALLERY GACHET (Canada) - Moroti George:

“[...] the important thing that really differentiates one cultural organization from the other is intention. [For me that has involved...] making sure that we are properly engaging with the artists and the community members that we are bringing into the gallery, resulting in people understand[ing] the stakes of the times [...] and developing a] **broader understanding of practices of care** that could help us move towards [a more desirable] life.”

The gallery “has built a **solid reputation** over the years as a serious cultural institution, so [this reputation] is part of what **I use as leverage for the community members**, in the sense that if you want to support Gachet, you also quite literally need to support other social services in the Downtown Eastside, like the Women’s Centre and the Indigenous Cultural Centre.”

PRACTICE: cultivating freedom and possibilities for individuals, communities, societies, systems

COMMUNITISM (Greece) - Natassa Dourida:

“The group of bohemians that founded our original space “were well-travelled, well-educated, yet had chosen to be in Athens during the darkest periods [of the crisis] because they **believed in the opportunities it can create, even in terms of creating new meanings**, from the basis of neglect and abandonment.”

NGBG (Sweden) - Iain Dace:

“With public funding, industrial land and voluntary workforce, all these different communities managed to come together without too much conflict, based on [the premise] **we would be independent, we would respect each other, tolerate each other, there would be freedom of expression and freedom of association.** The festival is non-profit, it’s open call, hyper-local, radically diverse, no tickets, no fences, no headliners.”

GALLERY GACHET (Canada) - Moroti George:

“I think it is important to **build multiple entry points** into anything that we are doing and **to make sure that people feel seen**, and finally that we consider our notions of power: how we think power presents itself, and our own reactions and engagements with power, especially within a multicultural culture. I think that it’s time for us to think about what power we have and what

power we don’t have and how we can **exchange from whatever position that we find ourselves.**”

“I have been able to build community with my people here in Vancouver, but **I’m interested in thinking about what it could look like globally with a global network of artists and thinkers who are working outside of the institution**, working outside of academia and using these things to better ourselves and the people that we care about and the general public.”