



Report Sharing Places Lab

15 - 22 October 2024

Blanca, Spain

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Framework

The Sharing Places Lab is part of the 3-year project '**Festivals as Catalysts for Social Change**', which is funded by DROSOS and OSF, and connects festivals with community revitalization in remote regions. It brings together diverse stakeholders to foster dialogue, strengthen social cohesion, and promote democracy.

Building on the work by TFA and its partners in the Mediterranean, the project addresses the need for stronger south-south regional networks. It offers **tailored training, upskilling activities, and exchange platforms for TFA alumni, local cultural actors, and cross-sector experts, with a focus on festival leaders from SWANA and Mediterranean region, with partners in Greece, Spain, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey.**

The Lab deepens transregional collaboration and explores how arts and festivals can drive economic, social, and political renewal in remote communities. It aims to generate new ideas and action plans for using festivals to revitalize the places activities take place in.

Why a Lab?

The '**Festival Labs**' aim to empower and foster connections within and beyond its community of over 1,400 Alumni and experts -festival makers, curators, artists, activists, academics, foundations, policy makers, etc.- who have participated in TFA training programs since 2006. Labs are **incubator hubs for a small group of festival makers and cross-sector experts to spend time together in order to catalyse thinking, and animate ideas and pilot projects which positively impact on society.**

The Labs are taking place in **remote locations, connected to nature as well as local cultural activities.** They aim is to investigate the role festivals can play in revitalizing regions economically and socially and exploring innovative models of working together. The topic of the Lab is designed in close collaboration with the local partner and follows the most pressing issues of the partner and their context.

The Sharing Places Lab followed the previous experience with **The Island Lab** in Boczaada (Turkey, May 2024), in partnership with Re-Connect Festival, which had a **focus on mobility and the inclusion of artists with mobility restrictions in festivals** and worked on setting up a residency space. You can read more about it [here](#).



AADK Spain

This is the second time, The Festival Academy partnered with AADK Spain after the Festival Visit at ROTA Music Festival in 2023 which you can read more about [here](#).

AADK Spain is an **artist-run platform** that develops **spaces for research and contemporary creation**. With a focus set on **experimental processes**, its primary interest is to **explore the notions of body, territory, and spatiality**. The platform advocates the **decentralization of culture** and the **access to contemporary art in non-urban areas**. It addresses local issues as means to understand global problems.

Currently based in Centro Negra (Blanca, Murcia) it holds several programs among which its Artist Residency Programmes.

Critical Spatialities

The **immersive residency programme** invited 6 selected artists to explore and research the Salinas del Curro (local abandoned salt flat) from various artistic disciplines. The concept of Critical Spatialities wanted to bring to the fore **questions about the interdependencies between natural, socio-political, ecological, economic processes and technology and the resulting spatial realities**.

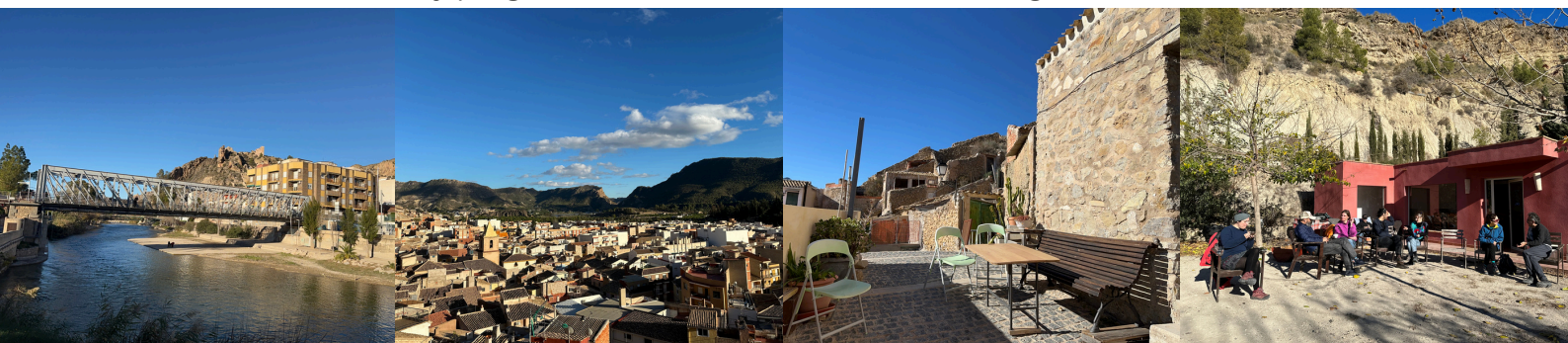
The open call for artists was launched in May 2024 and was intended for creators who **work with the criticality of space and undertake research, design, ephemeral or permanent interventions or installations**, and want to engage with the unique enclave of the Ricote Valley (Blanca, Murcia).

The residency program included guided visits with local actors, talks, a series of informal gatherings for exchange and the **participation in the Sharing Places Lab as well as the presentation of artistic works within the Lab programme**.



Location

Blanca is a small rural town of 6000 inhabitants, located in the heart of the Ricote Valley, on the banks of the Segura River. Its foundation dates from the thirteenth century – with Arab origins - and it was initially known as “Negra”, it is believed that due to the dark color of the soil on a mountain nearby. Blanca is surrounded by a mountain range and an extensive area of pine forests. The intense green of the Valley contrasts with its surroundings, which describe a landscape of vast semi-desert areas. The closest city is Murcia, capital of the province, which is 40 km away. The village is where AADK develops its Artistic Residency program and main activities in Centro Negra.



The **Salinas del Curro** are a remote and abandoned site between the mountains and gullies of the Ricote Valley. Located on the outskirts of the village, the former salt mine is accessible by foot along unpaved paths, tracing the dried riverbed where shimmering salt crystals glint through the soil, marking the remnants of its watercourse that reemerges each year. After navigating narrow trails lined with reeds and deserted gardens for about half an hour, the landscape opens onto a plateau. Here, a ruined house and two weathered salt pools stand framed by arid, stony hills. This environment serves as the research centre of the Critical Spatiality Residency, and was activated by the works of resident artists and the presence of visiting guests during the Lab.



Team

AADK Spain

Abraham Hurtado
Artistic Director at AADK Spain
performer and visual artist

Giuli Grippio
Artist and Collaborator



The Festival Academy

Inge Ceustermans
General Director

Fabiola Eidloth
Content Development
and New Initiatives

Do we create in the landscape or with the landscape?

Sharing Places was a 7-day long gathering designed to explore the interactions between art and the territory. Professionals from all artistic disciplines came together with cultural leaders and festival managers to debate how the landscape can influence our ways of creating and how our artistic practices can affect the landscape and its local communities.

The partners believe that artistic creativity does not have to be limited to traditional spaces such as galleries and art centres, and that **the landscape can be a living and dynamic element where ideas can flourish in unexpected ways.**

Through site-specific interventions, installations and outdoor performances, artists as well as audiences were invited to **explore how the unique characteristics of a place can influence the development of innovative works.** The partners also believe that geography, history, and local identity of each place have the **potential to open new perspectives** and **trigger a fertile dialogue between art and the space we inhabit.**

Sharing Places was therefore a gathering designed to **reflect on the friction points and enriching aspects of creative research in natural environments.** Considering the territory and environment as an central part of the reflections, the programme included an invitation to explore together the area of Ricote Valley, where participants reviewed a series of artworks and engaged in deep conversations in hybrid panel discussions and in-person working groups.

AADK and their residency space and programmes served as a best practice example. The landscape and site-specific artworks presented in the Lab were created during 2024 in the framework of AADK Spain's Immersive Residency Program in Salinas del Curro.



What is an artistic residency?

At AADK residencies are meant to **facilitate artistic research, collaboration and knowledge exchange**. AADK has been developing artistic residency programs since 2012 and continuously refined and redefined them. Over the years, AADK's residency programs have hosted more than 400 researchers and artists from all disciplines, ages and continents.

The main objective of the AADK residencies is to reflect on the **potentialities of rural environments** in a world that tends towards massive urbanization, based on the belief that **working on a local scale allows to rethink global problems**.

Building on AADK's extensive knowledge and experience, the Lab was an invitation to **festival leaders and artists to come together to reflect and rethink the meaning of an artistic residency together and to understand its potential as a meeting point for art and land but also to inquire its possible negative impact on sites and local communities**.

The **geographical diversity of participants** immensively enriched discussions on the **roles and implications of residencies in different political and societal contexts** and expanded the conversation towards of transregional/global perspectives of residencies, and furthermore bringing in their expertise on current conflicts and crises affecting cultural/artistic production in the Mediterranean and SWANA region.

In this context, the Lab was guided by the questions **What does a residency/residency space mean in the broader global context of today and the conflicts affecting directly the Mediterranean and SWANA region? and How can we build new support systems and solidarity as well as artistic exchanges/collaboration between artists and residency spaces in these regions?**



Programme

Tuesday 15th

19:30 – 20:00 Welcome gathering and clearing up doubts

21:00 Welcome dinner

Wednesday 16th

8:00 Sunrise morning silent walk & flow practice in the river

10:00 Joint breakfast of TFA guests at Villa Matilda – Working session #1

13:30 Collective Lunch

15:00-16:00 (Hybrid) Informal introductory meeting at Villa Matilda - Turning absence into presence

16:30 Departure towards Murcia

17:00 – 19:30 Guided visit to Cuartel de Artillería and Centro Párraga, in Murcia. Facilitated by Andrés Agudelo.

19:30 – 20:00 Light dinner

20:30 – 21:30 Performance by Abraham Hurtado & Manos Kotsaris in Centro Párraga.

22:00 Return to Blanca

Thursday 17th

8:00 Sunrise morning silent walk & flow practice in the river.

10:00 – 13:00 Visit to Centro Negra and coffee with team members and artists in residency. Time to explore the outdoor farmers market.

13:30 Collective Lunch

16:30 Short hike & conversation with Gabriela Cordovez about her experience working in Salinas del Curro.

18:30 A selection of video works from the Immersive Residency Program will be projected in Centro Negra, drinks will be available.

20:00 Collective dinner





Friday 18th

Sunrise morning silent walk and flow practice in the river.

13:30 Collective lunch

16:00 – 19:00 Time to explore Salinas del Curro & ongoing performances.

20:00 Dinner

Saturday 19th

Sunrise morning silent walk and flow practice in the river.

12:00 Open space in Aldarrax garden to share impressions and check-in with the group. Proposals for movement practices can be incorporated!

13:30 Collective lunch

15:00 – 16:30 Turning absence into presence - hybrid conversation between all artists/guests and with online guests Aurelien Zouki (Hammana Artist House; Lebanon) and Nima Deghani (Re-connect Festival and residencies; US/Iran/Turkey)

17:00 Presentation by Juana Juarez, in Centro Negra, followed by a concert by Enrique del Castillo

20:00 Collective dinner.



Sunday 20th & Monday 21st

Sunrise morning silent walk and flow practice in the river.

13:30 Collective Lunch

15:30 – 18:30 Hybrid Lab at Aldarrax - Further in-depth reflection on the main Sharing Places questions and new questions that came up throughout the week and immersive experience.

(Online guests: Aurelien Zouki, Anas Nahleh, Nima Deghani, Oussama Rifahi (AFAC board member/consultant; Lebanon/Germany - to be confirmed), Anis Barnat (community arts network; Greece)



Participants (in person)

The group stayed all together in the Villa Matilde, sharing a house for a full week.

Anas Abu Nahleh (Alumnus Beirut) is an artist and co-founder of Studio 8, a dance company based in Amman, Jordan, with which he conducts residencies and performances in the desert around the Dead Sea. He focuses on exploring remote natural sites that increase awareness of the past, present and future. He was selected because of his extensive knowledge about the Jordan cultural scene and in order to strengthen connections between the regions.

Marina Barham is the co-founder and General Director of Al-Harah Theater, with over two decades of experience as a cultural operator in Palestine, the Middle East, and Europe. She has been a leading figure in numerous cultural initiatives and organizations, advocating for social change through the arts. Her work covers production of theater performances and festivals, international tours, and building capacity of young artists and technical staff in Palestine through artistic residencies for international and local artists. She was selected to take part in the Lab for her extensive knowledge of the region and her capacity to create new collaborations.

Christina Skarpari (Alumna Nicosia) is the founder and creative director of Xarkis Festival, an international nomadic art festival that tours the mountain villages of Cyprus. As an artistic director, designer-researcher and educator, she works at the confluence of social and communication design. Her work focuses on interdisciplinary and site-specific practice, grounded in socio-ecological curiosity and feminist care. She was selected to support the mission of the Lab to strengthen creative connections across the Mediterranean, expanding AADKs network and contributing bridging collaborative links between Cyprus and Spain.

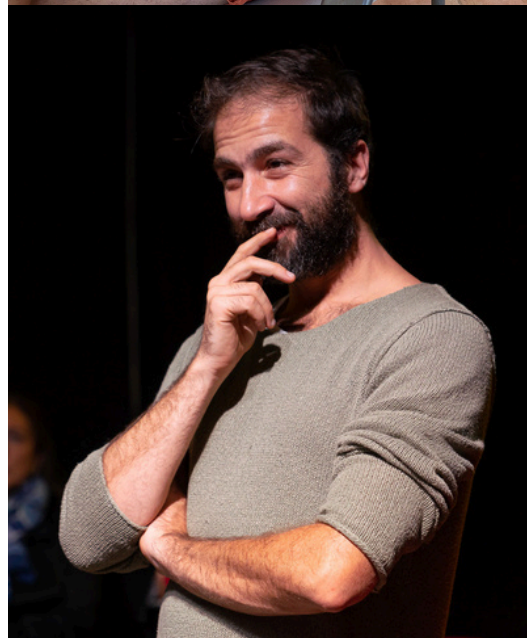


Hazem Header (Alumnus New York) is an Egyptian contemporary dancer, choreographer, and artistic director of Breaking Walls Festival, the first international festival for site-specific performances in Cairo, and Breaking Walls Dance Film Festival, Egypt's first dance film festival. He is also the founder of the dance company NÜT Dance Company, which encourages volunteers and welcomes a broad spectrum of dance enthusiasts from all age ranges and backgrounds. He was selected for the Lab for his broad knowledge of the region as well as for his current interest to create a South-South showcase with arts managers from the Mediterranean.



Participants (online)

Aurelien Zouki (Expert Beirut) is an actor, choreographer and performer. He is co-founder of the performance group Collectif Kahraba and co-director of Nehna wel Amar wel Jiran, a multidisciplinary open-air festival organised by Collectif Kahraba. He was selected to take part in the Lab not only for his knowledge of Lebanon's cultural landscape, but also for his involvement in the co-foundation/management of Hammana Artist House, an artistic residency space. Due to the current situation in Lebanon, he couldn't join the group in person and participated in the hybrid Lab.



Nima Deghani (Mentor Elefsina) is a multidisciplinary artist, writer, and director whose work bridges the intersections of technology, art, and human connection. He is the co-founder of Re-Connect Festival and initiator of The Island project in Turkey. He was selected to join the Lab conversations online because of his involvement as host in the first Lab, his interest in strengthening networks of artistic residencies in the Mediterranean, and for his focus and knowledge of working with artists with mobility restrictions.



Guests (online)



Anis Barnat (expert)

Co-founder El Sistema and Managing
Director Community Arts Network - Greece

Oussama Rifahi (expert)

Cultural management consultant and board
member of the Arab Fund for Arts and
Culture (AFAC) - Germany/Lebanon

Working session 16th October

The working session began with a breakfast gathering on the terrace of Villa Matilde. Inge opened the session by introducing The Festival Academy (TFA) and the Lab formats to the participants. This introductory discussion set a reflective and thought-provoking tone for the week's conversations.

Amid the backdrop of the war in Gaza and the ongoing attacks in Lebanon, the group collectively expressed **feelings of powerlessness** at a political level. Participants expressed the complexity of addressing humanity's failures, particularly in the face of crisis. Simple gestures such as asking, "How are you? What do you need?" were acknowledged as essential but often overlooked. The conversation soon centered around **ideas of what could be achieved through collective action within communities**.

One of the main topic was **ways of community building through South-South and Mediterranean collaboration**. The group explored what hinders and what could help to build up connections and strengthen solidarity across the Mediterranean region.

Christina proposed the idea of **forming a collective residency program to encourage cross-regional artistic collaboration**. This idea could have the shape of a traveling/nomadic multi-year programme to Cyprus, Egypt, Syria, Jordan. It could have a rotational structure where each country could host annually or contribute with local expertise to artist selection and program curation.

Marina emphasized the importance of **empathy and listening** to understand the challenges faced by others. She questioned how to **overcome fear** of the unfamiliar and organize collectively for human rights. Marina highlighted that it is an **artist's responsibility to stand for values and advocate for human rights**. She asserted that art and humanity are inseparable:

“If you’re not involved and don’t take a stance, then you’re not truly an artist.” (Marina Barham)

She also stated a **lack of Palestinian representation** and resulting misrepresentation in European platforms. In response to this, the group discussed the concept of co-creating safe spaces by including those affected and engaging with them in honest conversations that also allow conflicts to surface constructively.

Christina proposed challenging existing power structures through innovative approaches like **“hacking” systems** of representation. Hazem noted that addressing the underrepresentation of marginalized voices, such as those from Palestine, could be only achieved if these were **included in boards and committees**.

The discussion evolved around different roles and definitions of "places." These included **places of fear, places of shame, and places of silence**—spaces where individuals often feel isolated; **places of power**, such as being part of boards, advisory groups, and decision-making bodies; as well as **places of togetherness**, where opportunities for collective action can be created, rooted in shared values and common goals.

The session elaborated on questions of engaging with authoritarian powers, overcoming fear, activating collective privilege, and the responsibilities of artists in addressing human rights violations. Discussions then centered on **care, solidarity, protest, and the urgent need for better organization within the arts sector**, particularly in the face of global injustices. Participants grappled with the challenges of uniting through shared values and leveraging their collective impact to drive meaningful change.

A recurring theme was the **difficulty of navigating interactions with authoritarian regimes while upholding principles of justice and humanity**. The group reflected on how fear can paralyze collective action, emphasizing the importance of activating solidarity through the privilege of being together. This **sense of togetherness was identified as a crucial tool for overcoming fear and building resilience**.

The conversation highlighted the need for the arts sector to organize itself more effectively, with participants urging greater collaboration, clearer goals, and a shared vision to enhance their collective influence. Establishing and reaffirming common values—such as **care, justice, solidarity, and freedom of expression**—was seen as a vital step in uniting diverse voices within the sector. The participants stressed that these **values must guide their work and interactions, forming a foundation for collective efforts** to address pressing global issues.

Care and solidarity emerged as central themes in the discussion. Participants critiqued the disproportionate emphasis in Europe on climate change compared to its silence on ongoing genocides, noting the double standard this represents. The **climate consequences of war** were cited as an overlooked but significant issue. Marina shared her personal experience with the Palestinian crisis as a turning point, expressing **disillusionment with colleagues** who used the “complexity” of the conflict as an excuse for inaction. This **failure to respond compassionately** underscored, for her, a broader failure of humanity.

The role of the arts was described as **inseparable from human engagement and empathy**. Art, it was argued, serves as a bridge across polarized divides, fostering intimacy and proximity that can counteract alienation and fear. The group considered how these qualities could be harnessed to rebuild human connections and create spaces for mutual understanding.

The discussion also examined **protest and freedom of expression**. Participants acknowledged the diversity of protest forms, from social media activism to organizing panels and platforms, while recognizing the risks that online dissent can pose in authoritarian contexts. Marina shared her initiative of **creating WhatsApp and Telegram groups to circulate news within trusted networks**, highlighting a pragmatic approach to sustaining solidarity.

A striking observation was the **paradox of freedom of expression**. In Berlin, freedoms related to gender and sexuality flourish, yet pro-Palestine protests face censorship, revealing deep inconsistencies in how freedom is upheld. Marina reflected on the shift in dynamics between European and Palestinian experiences of expression. Historically, Europeans were seen as exemplars of freedom of speech, but it now seems that Palestinians, even under military occupation, exhibit greater courage and freedom in expressing dissent.

This session underscored the critical need for solidarity, action, and unity through shared values, particularly in an era marked by global crises and pervasive injustices. The reflections offered a powerful reminder of the transformative potential of the arts to create proximity, amplify marginalized voices, and sustain the fight for justice and humanity.



Turning Absence into Presence 16th October

Hybrid Lab (intro-session)

Given the situation in which some of the invited guests were unable to travel to Blanca due to travel restrictions, financial difficulties or their commitment to support locals during ongoing attacks on Lebanon, partners integrated hybrid offers in the programme.

On 16 October, a first informal hybrid introductory meeting gathered all in-person and online Lab participants. It was meant to get to know one another, exchange how we are doing, and discuss our needs and expectations moving forward.

Aurelien Zouki, actor, director, festival maker, and founder of a residency space in Hammana, a village about an hour from Beirut, shared insights from the on-site work on the ground in Lebanon. He mentioned the **shift of his artist collective from their creative work to assisting displaced people by providing shelter, food, and blankets**, as well as **hosting 25 people from a heavily targeted region in their residency space**. He highlighted the dual nature of the current situation with experiencing beauty and ugliness at the same time. While being confronted with a lot of suffering, he also noticed many acts of solidarity. He furthermore stressed the **importance of discussing how territories are made unlivable to force people to leave**.

The conversation also spoke about **places of solidarity and strategies of taking action**, the **role of silent protests and demonstrations** in raising awareness and promoting justice, as well as **boycotting and or highlighting voices from war-affected countries** like Palestine or Lebanon through their invitation to international cultural or artistic events. The group emphasised the need for **places of courage** among those advocating for freedom of expression and human rights. Nima Deghani from Re-Connect Festival shared the concept of their project working around global mobility restrictions and their central aim of incorporating displaced artists into their festival as a form of solidarity.



Conversation with Gabriela Cordova 17th October

In a session held at Centro Negra, the international group of curators gathered for a talk with Brazilian artist in residence Gabriela Cordova. Cordova shared questions that were part of her artistic research and guided the audience through her personal reflections on arriving in spaces and the meaning of encountering a place without colonizing it.

Cordova emphasized the **need to honour what precedes us** (the histories, beings, and memories deeply rooted in the land) and to question our roles and intentions when entering an unknown space. She explored her ideas through the example of her work at Salinas del Curro and shared her fascination with its memory, imagining it as a site that once held a vast lake connected to the ancient Mar de Tetis. This **geological history** inspired her to connect with the place through its **aquatic past by intertwining her own memories of the ocean (in Brazil) with the imagined pre-human memory of the Salinas** and she read a poem that transcended times and spaces, merging the territory of her research with the feelings it evoked in her (drawing parallels between the landscape of the Salinas and the sertões of Brazil - regions marked by drought and marginalization.)

In her practice she tries to **resist romanticizing or classifying these landscapes**, instead **seeking ways to approach them with openness and humility**. She suggests **opacity** as a path forward where there is no need to fully understand and thus classify 'The Unknown, 'The Other' or similar. Like **resisting on being confined to the label of "Latin American artist,"** the artist also resists defining the territories she encounters.

The discussion then evolved around the constant negotiation of identity and place. To redefine territory, Cordova proposed to move away from fixed notions and **embracing fluidity - spaces of desire, movement, and speculation**. While classification may be inevitable, it can be crucial to interrogate its origins: Does it stem from violence or curiosity? From power or connection?

The conversation expanded with reflections from Marina, who emphasized the violence inherent in the not-knowing, particularly when it erases or dismisses "The Other". **"Trying to use the word Palestinian was a struggle. Trying to explain where I come from takes a lot of work. I will never say isolate me from being Palestinian. Our relation to the territory is fix. We struggle to prove to be considered Palestinians."**



Salinas works - Reflection session 19th October

In a reflective session held at Aldarrax garden, the group of artists-in-residence and international curators, together with the host Abraham Hurtado, discussed their experiences and impressions of the collective artistic activation of the Salinas in the previous day. The session emphasized the exchange between audience and artist perspectives, as well as voices from different geographical contexts within the broader themes of art in the public space, residencies in landscapes, and community involvement.

Context and Background

Abraham opened the session by providing **context for the Salinas activation project, explaining its place within AADK's twelve-year trajectory**. The current residency program was designed around a specific and clearly delimited space in the Salinas, offering artists a concrete structure to guide their practice while allowing them **deep immersion their creative exploration and in the landscape**. This approach built upon years of groundwork, during which AADK built up trust among local authorities and communities. Initially, their focus was on local actors, introducing contemporary art to local audiences through educational projects, including a deep listening school for children. Only after four years of engaging the community did AADK feel ready to launch their residency program. "The people and community allow us to do this here," Abraham noted, adding that in the village, they are known and accepted as "the guys from Negra."

Community Needs

The development of community relations involves **constant negotiation of shared spaces**. For instance, AADK's experimental ROTA festival was cancelled, mainly due to lack of fundings but also because of local sensitivities toward sound. Consequently, AADK adapted by using Centro Negra - which is situated right in the heart of Blanca - primarily for artistic research project to better address local needs. **"We decided to focus on research and residencies. We are not the cultural center of Blanca. AADK is not public but artist-focused,"** Abraham explained.

Christina shared her experience with the nomadic Xarkis festival in Cyprus, highlighting the **challenges of integrating into local communities**. She emphasized the delicate **balance between social engagement and artistic expression**, stating, "We are not social workers but professional artists. There has to be a balance. It doesn't work to do everything at once."

The community engaged artist

The group controversially discussed the encounters with audiences in the public space of the Salinas, the role of the artist while working in the landscape and responsibilities of the arts to create platforms of exchange between artists and local communities.

Abraham highlighted that while **working with landscapes necessitates community engagement**, some projects (like the Salinas activation) are not yet ready for public involvement. He explained, “The valley is conservative, and some people don’t want to open up to this experience.”

Maddi, an artist-in-residence, shared an incident during the activation where **two locals passing by coincidentally** compared her appearance to things they had seen online, remarking, “Oh, I thought she was plastic.” While this was unsettling for the artist, Abraham reassured that such comparisons are human nature and stem out of curiosity.

The discussion then centered further around the **confrontation between artists scenes and local communities** and the impact that this encounter can have. Raiza (artist-in-residence) compared the experience to a Greek theater project she organised in the public space, where **audience members used their phones and commented loudly during the performance**. She viewed this as an opportunity for inclusion, stating, “**I think this is something to be embraced, that's part of inclusion and truly breaking the canon.**” The two accidental guests were my favourites. I want to know how this is perceived, to find a common ground together.”

Gabriela Cordova emphasized the **distinction between unfamiliarity (not used to) and lack of understanding (not knowing)**, recounting valuable feedback from underserved communities in Rio.

Laila Tafur proposed that **artists in open spaces must share attention with the community**, which fosters healthy displacement and interaction.

Raiza further suggested reframing the question: “**Who is affecting whom?**” This applies equally to the landscape and the community.





Territorial inequalities

The discussion was enriched by the group of international curators bringing in their unique perspectives on arts in public space, and working with the territory, discussing it from different geographical contexts with focus on SWANA region.

Marina reflected on Laila Tafur's performance, where Laila, dressed in red, moved up and down the hills, evoking a **sense of safety in the landscape and empowerment in the public space**. Marina remarked, **"Seeing everyone around me feel safe was new. Being an artist in a public space while feeling safe is very empowering."**, a situation quite unusual in her context in the occupied West Bank.

Anas described his challenges in Jordan working in public spaces, recounting **accusations of promoting inappropriate behaviour** by the authorities. He stressed the importance of providing artists with **creative freedom in controlled environments**, explaining "this is why we do a residency in the desert, because I am bored to tell people what not to do. **The desert is the only space where we can give artists a certain degree of freedom.**"

Hazem shared his admiration for the Salinas activation, describing it as an immersive experience that engaged all his senses. Reflecting on **restrictions in his home country with limited spaces owned by conservative companies**, he advocated for a festival to be organised in the Salinas that could involve local and international communities in shaping the event.

The artists agreed that the **presence of an audience transformed the space after a rather isolated creation process**. Joaquin mentioned the performativity of both artists and audiences and questioning the ownership over the landscape: **"The visitors are not an invasion of the space because it is not our property."**

Abraham emphasized the aim of the activation of the Salinas to **create an open-air museum** and to explore ways of **presenting shows without using any technical equipment** to reach more authenticity but also take an anti-capitalistic stance.

Raisa concluded, **"The space decides for us what to do,"** underscoring the fluid relationship between the landscape and the artists' work.

Turning Absence into presence 20+21 October

In the second hybrid session of the Lab, participants who could not attend in person had the opportunity to present their work to the rest of the group. The focus lied on rethinking the role of artistic residencies amidst conflict/war guided by the questions:

What does a residency/ residency space mean in the broader global context of today and the conflicts affecting directly the Mediterranean and SWANA region? How can we build new support systems and solidarity as well as artistic exchanges/collaboration between artists and residency spaces in these regions?

Aurelien shared his further in-depth insights into the challenges and transformations that artistic residencies undergo in times of crisis. Due to the ongoing attacks on southern Lebanon and Beirut, Aurelien explained how their **residency practically manoeuvres between artistic purpose and serving as cultural community hub**.

In the face of urgent need, the artistic residency space provided shelter for refugees in the village. With the sudden displacement of 300 people, the school that was part of the residency's infrastructure has been converted into emergency housing, equipped with makeshift kitchens and bathrooms. The kitchen that once supported artistic activities is now delivering food, and the residency's staff is working around the clock to provide essential supplies.

Aurelien shared how this **shift back to basic community service has brought about a mix of solidarity and hardship**. The residency's resources are now dedicated to offering relief to those most affected, reinforcing a shared **sense of humanity in times of crisis**. While much of this work is fueled by collective goodwill and solidarity, Aurelien also noted the disturbing reality of profiteers seeking to exploit the situation for personal gain.

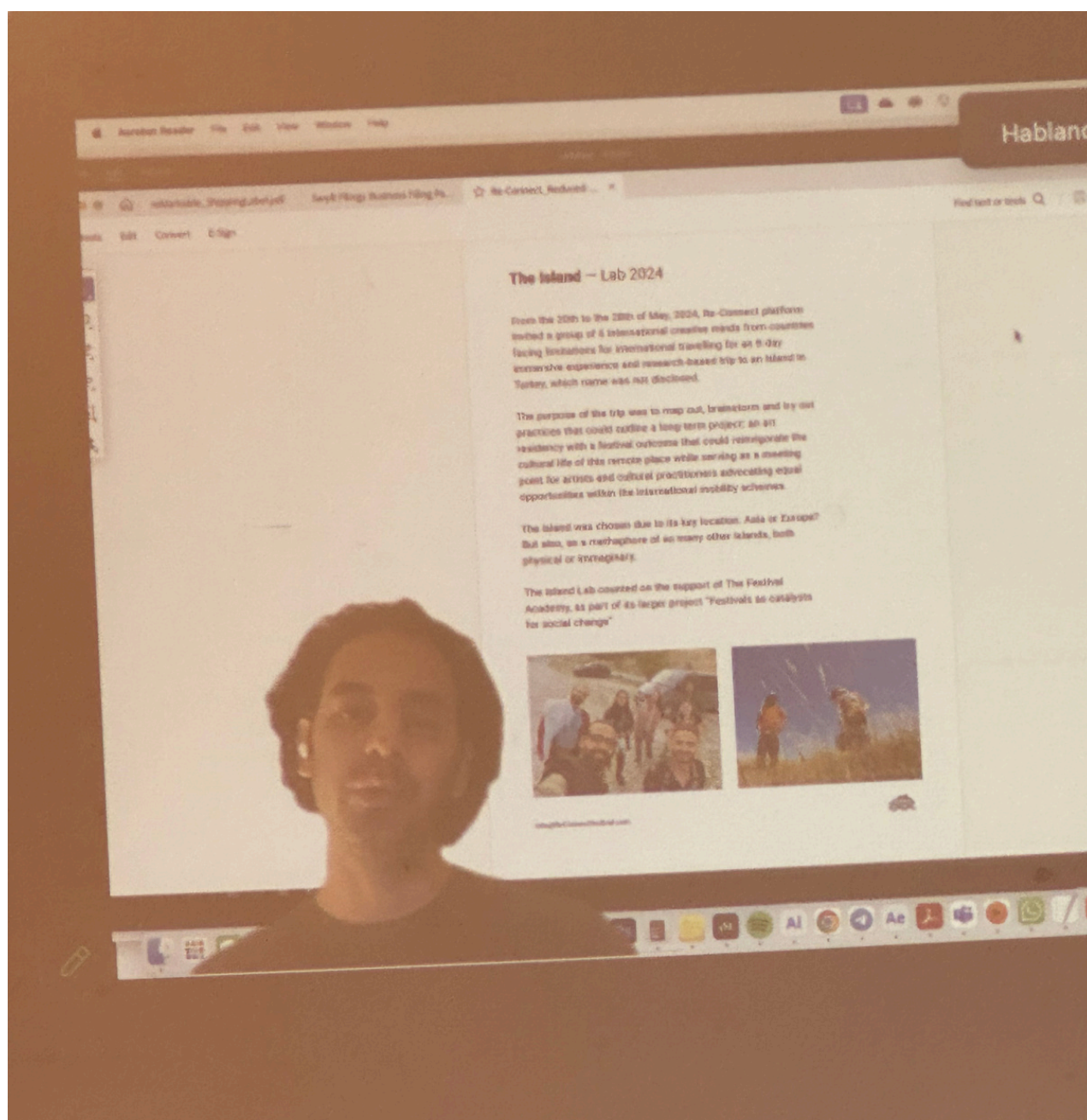
Despite these challenges, he highlighted that the residency's transformation into a shelter underlines the **importance of support systems that can adapt in times of crisis**, and proves the **deep connection between cultural institutions and the broader community**.



Notes

- Artistic residencies have the adaptive capacity to serve urgent humanitarian needs during times of crises.
- Existing infrastructure can be repurposed for shelter, food, essential services.
- A moment of crisis can highlight the role of artistic actors within community solidarity and resilience.
- Cultural spaces should stay adaptable and truly connected to their communities in crises.
- Residencies can bridge art and humanitarian aid in conflict regions.

Nima Deghani shared the evolution of their festival, which began as the **online Re-connect festival during COVID, aiming to foster connection amidst social distancing and pandemic related travel restrictions**. This project transitioned into an offline initiative on an Island in Turkey, in collaboration with local residents, with a pilot edition developed with minimal resources. The **festivals' topic shifted towards mobility inequalities and travel restrictions based on different countries of origin**. In the framework of the Island project, they created a residency that served as a "third playground" for artists marginalized due to their passports and disconnected from the global arts community. Guests evolved into partners through a collaborative Lab (see The Island Lab), designing "a residency within a residency." Nima shared his wish to **connect the Island residency with AADK Blanca and provide a space for displaced people** - not to serve them, but to foster mutual exchange and dialogue. He also proposed to think further about concrete actions such as **global strikes** and other to show solidarity with under-represented cultural workers.



Feedback - in person participants

Pre-arrival Information, Agenda and Program

- The information provided was clear and sufficient.
- Early communication was appreciated, but giving more advance notice would be beneficial in future editions.
- Participants praised the agenda's balance between intense sessions and personal reflection time.
- Suggestions included incorporating movement, performative, or co-design exercises to enhance engagement.
- Participants felt encouraged to contribute actively, proposing ideas and engaging in discussions, particularly during informal moments like outdoor exhibitions and meals.

Challenges

- Minimal challenges were noted, though some physical activities (e.g., walking) were observed as strenuous for certain participants.
- One participant shared a personal emotionally overwhelming moment when reflecting on his Palestinian origins during a session.

Satisfying Moments

- Key highlights included social bonding, dancing, cultural activities, and personal milestones like one participant celebrating his birthday.

Connections

- Strong personal and professional connections between TFA Alumni were made, fostering collaboration and mutual support.
- Participants highlighted the smooth, peer-to-peer exchange with AADK staff and residency artists and deepening relationships throughout the Lab.
- Witnessing artists' creative processes was inspiring, intimate, and engaging, with participants expressing admiration and a desire for deeper involvement.

Physical Practices and Cultural Visits

- Physical activities like walks and hikes helped participants connect with the local environment, cultural visits provided meaningful insights into the local artistic and cultural landscape.

Areas for Improvement

- The primary challenge identified was the limited time for deeper bonding and collaboration. Sustaining connections beyond the Lab was noted as a priority (Christina).

Impact, Future Intentions and Collaborations

- The Lab had a significant impact, providing inspiration, hope, and new perspectives for future artistic and professional endeavors.
- Participants expressed strong interest in returning to Blanca, envisioning roles as artists, curators, or collaborators in future editions.
- Ideas for future collaborations included building up transregional residency programs and cross-cultural projects across the Mediterranean and SWANA region.

Feedback Online Participants

Pre-Session Information

- Information was generally sufficient, but earlier delivery and clearer goals would improve preparation.
- One participant appreciated the effort to create a space for meaningful connection.

Meaning of Participation, Experience of Hybrid Sessions

- Participation was valued for its inclusivity and warmth, despite technical and logistical challenges.
- Topics were engaging, but technical difficulties and the limitations of online communication impacted discussions. Suggestions included better preparation and creating separate online discussion spaces.

Areas for Improvement

- Improved organization, clearer goals, and better integration of online participants were recommended. Creating moments specifically for online contributors could enhance their role and engagement.

Shared Materials

- Materials in the shared folder were helpful for those who accessed them.

Future Collaborations

- Online participants expressed interest in future collaborations, with ideas for new projects discussed but not fully developed due to the hybrid format.
- One participant highlighted potential collaboration through their festival platform in Lebanon.
- Online participants preferred a mix of online and in-person follow-ups to maintain connections and foster future collaborations.



Outcomes

- **Strengthened the community among Alumni of The Festival Academy** through in-depth exchanges, building connections, and a deeper understanding of each other's backgrounds, personal stories, projects, and festivals.
- **In-depth connections and exchange with more than 25 international artists** from within the AADK programme.
- **Built meaningful relationships with the local community**, including artists and staff of AADK and Centro Negra.
- **Gained a deeper understanding of the region and the local culture**, as well as the challenges, connecting, learning about the unique cultural, social, economic and geopolitical context.
- **Practical and discursive exchange on the impact of art and festivals on local communities, the landscape and environment**
- **Exchange about the role of arts in contexts of conflict/war** and deeper understanding how creativity can support solidarity and care.
- **Experienced and explored strategies for working and producing in challenging contexts**, learning how to navigate logistical, social, and political obstacles.
- **Firsthand experience of local approaches to revitalizing socially and economically challenged regions**, understanding how art and festivals can play a role in community transformation.
- **Built bridges between participating regions with a focus on Mediterranean and SWANA, and peripheries (such as islands)**, fostering cross-cultural understanding and collaboration that transcend geographical boundaries.



New ideas

Working group

As a follow-up of the Sharing Places Lab, a working group has been set up, consisting of artists-in-residence from the AADK programme and Alumni of TFA who meet regularly to **discuss about concrete action plans and solidarity actions to support peers in contexts of conflict/war/societal tension**. Collaboratively, they have developed the monthly online listening sessions “Voices From”, with its 3rd edition currently being prepared.

Voices From Sessions

Voices From is an online series run by Festival Academy that was born out of the Sharing Places Lab in Blanca, Spain and is co-organised by a working group of Alumni who took part in it. The series acts as an **open space to listen to artists of all disciplines, filmmakers, cultural workers and festival makers** who add valuable context to the current situation in **regions that face conflict or societal tension** and explore how art can challenge narratives, strengthen resilience, and promote understanding.

#1 Voices From Palestine and Lebanon

Al-Harah Theater and The Festival Academy, in cooperation with Collectif Kahraba/Hammana Artist House and Zoukak Theatre invited to an online event during the International Week of Solidarity with Palestine:

"Voices from Palestine and Lebanon" - The performing arts sectors' challenges and actions during the attacks on both countries. How are performing arts organisations coping on the ground?

The 90-minute session took place on **27th November at 3:00 PM (UTC +1)**, on Zoom and provided a platform to listen to artists and cultural workers based in Bethlehem, Hammana, and Beirut. The event is based on registration.



Speakers were:

- **Marina Barham (Co-founder and General Director, Al-Harah Theater/Bethlehem)**
- **Omar Abi Azar (Theatre Director/Founding Member Zoukak Theatre Company/Beirut)**
- **Aurelien Zouki (Co-director and Founding Member Hammana Artist House)**
- **George Matar (Production Manager, Al-Harah Theater/Bethlehem)**

The event was attended by 55 people.

#2 Voices From: Reclaiming the Narrative



In the second session of our Voices From series, taking place on Thursday 30th January at 3 PM (UTC +1), we welcome Vanessa Bowles and Carol Sansour as our speakers. Vanessa and Carol are joined in a conversation around representation, film and ways to reclaim female Arab voices within the arts sector.

Carol Sansour, born in Jerusalem, is a Palestinian poet and cultural producer based in Athens, Greece. Her debut poetry collection *في المشمش* (In the Time of the Apricots) was published in 2019 as a trilingual edition. Since then, her poetry has been featured in prestigious international journals and translated into multiple languages. In addition to her literary contributions, Carol is the director of the Athens Palestine Film Festival and the founder of Dounias, a non-profit organization dedicated to producing and exhibiting Palestinian and Arab art and culture in Greece. She will be speaking about her experience as a poet and also a coordinator for Palestine Film Festival in Athens and the challenges she faced to put this together.

Vanessa Bowles is a Lebanese/British producer and director based in London since she moved from Beirut in 2011. Her film *Kill Zone: Inside Gaza* has aired recently on Channel 4. Vanessa has also directed *Queer Egypt Under Attack* in 2023 and has produced multiple award-winning documentaries and current affairs films and series, like *Once Upon a Time in Iraq* (2020) which won a BAFTA, a Grierson, and a Royal Television Society and *Saudi Arabia Uncovered* (2016) which won an Emmy award, the Royal Television Society TV journalism award & Jury Grand Prize at the Golden Nymphs. Vanessa will be speaking about her most recent film and the difficulties in making it happen, especially the brave work of the team working on the ground.

The 90-minute session is curated and moderated by Marina Barham (Artistic Director Al-Harah Theater - Palestine) and Raisa Desypri (Curator and Cultural Manager of ASTRO Collective and OYL - Germany/Greece). The event is based on registration.

Registrations for this event are still open and have been distributed widely.



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