

NETWORK MEETING REPORT

CITIZENS LAB



Frankfurt (Oder), Słubice 5-8 October 2017

THE CITIZENS LAB

The CitizensLab is a 'laboratory' called by MitOst e.V. and funded in its pilot phase (March 2016-April 2018) by Stiftung Mercator and Robert Bosch Stiftung. It brings together a diverse group of European citizens, civil society actors and local authority workers to explore through exchange and prototyping of practice, the emerging new civil society and the changes that are being created through this in Europe. The CitizensLab is using a Lab approach that works towards a collectively shared longer term goal, is hosted through a core team of its own members, experiments through translocal initiatives and builds a network or community of practice of members and partners. Five different modalities are used to operate the C-Lab: (1) Network Meetings when members come together in person to exchange, discuss and co-create, (2) Mobility Exchanges where members can visit each other and create translocal initiatives, (3) Prototypes where members can experiment ideas and approaches for the new system to emerge, (4) Lumen as the on-line platform that is used for information exchange, dialogue and decision making, the on line connections also includes webinars and conference calls and a (5) website that shares information on wider about the CitizensLab.

THE 3RD NETWORK MEETING

The CitizensLab 3rd Network Meeting was a transition point from its pilot phase into a development phase. The transition has seen one of the funders, i.e. Stiftung Mercator, deciding not to fund the next phase, whilst also its host organisation, MitOst, going through its own management transitions as well as seeing the opportunity to widen the CitizensLab as a format for all its Members and Alumni. The climate in which the meeting took place held uncertainty about its future, as well as complexity due to the inter-relationship between different factors. Therefore, the main discussions during the CitizensLab served the purpose of working with this transition in a generative and creative manner although it was taking place in an ambiguous environment. The meeting included the following:

Arriving and Orienting

Surfacing lessons learnt and identity

Imagining the Future & Conversations with MitOst Management

Opening up to the wider eco-system of MitOst members

Converging and Next Step

The overall outcome of the 3rd Network Meeting was a greater sense of identity and understanding of what the members of the CitizensLab are co-learning and co-hosting. This created a deeper sense of collective ownership and self-organisation, as well as greater clarity on the value of the CitizensLab. The emerging maturation of the CitizensLab's members was also evident with the manner in which the existing uncertainty of its future was dealt with collectively so positively and creatively.

ARRIVING AND ORIENTING

Frankfurt (Oder) and Slubice

The MitOst Festival was seen as the perfect setting to hold the 3rd Network Meeting, as the C-Lab is part of the MitOst landscape and offered the opportunity to be involved in the wider Festival activities. Its location of Frankfurt (Oder) and Slubice perfectly mirrored the C-Lab's own position of moving from one phase to the next, as these two cities are connected via a bridge and transition people from one country of Europe to another. These cities have a long history of movement and migration of people, with even the current population not having long roots in place. The Festival and Meeting taking place here is an opportunity to bring new life and the new power of citizen agency to both cities.



The Oder River and the bridge connecting Frankfurt Oder (Germany) and Slubice (Poland)

Hosting with Self Organisation

A more self-organised pattern for hosting the meeting took place as the preparation of the programme included members of the C-Lab as well as the MitOst co-ordinators and external facilitator. In addition, the way the programme was hosted left the space for other members attending the meeting to be involved in the co-designing of the third and fourth day. Therefore, at the end of the second and third day, a 'Co-evolving our Design' session was held where anyone from the C-Lab could join and support sensing and designing the next day's agenda. This allowed the diverse knowledge held in the C-Lab to be shared as well as gave a good practice ground for working with collective intelligence. This more self-organised way of hosting the meeting also allowed for greater flexibility so that a more agile response could be taken to unexpected events as well as capitalising on unforeseen opportunities.



Gerry Proctor hosting the conversation on the CitizensLab emerging identity

Practising Working with Uncertainty

The 3rd Network Meeting opened with a blindfold exercise that perfectly reflected the uncertainty that would need to be worked with throughout the Meeting. This prepared each member in an embodied way to not fear ambiguity and uncertainty, as well as value being part of a collective where together we can find our way. A 'Check in' Circle where everyone spoke to the question "What do I bring to the 3rd Network Meeting" also allowed the diverse and strong base of knowledge, skills, experiences, and dreams of the field to become visible. This included:

- A view into the different aspect of Europe – both dark and bright
- Amazing projects and local actions that we are all doing
- Hearing how the CitizensLab is entering more fully into our lives
- Wondering how we can infect and contaminate each other and our places with our work!

QUOTES FROM THE CHECK-IN

"Experiences from projects in Greece related to active citizenship and resilience as well as cultural management"

"The will in Turkey to exchange with the broader world through Erasmus projects and not be cut off"

"Personally feeling success but strange feeling in the political and national sphere of Spain"

"Initiatives can flourish by the power of the collective"

"I am happy and used to working with chaos!"

"I like to be here. I like to hear stories about work that really make a difference"

"Great sense of isolation - Difficulty in organizing my thoughts because of the situation in Turkey"

"Engaged in evaluation research in Ukraine. People usually pessimistic are pushing for transition, I got inspired by these people"

"Crazy world: we might be able to shape it" 😊

"Great time in our prototype groups, appreciate the opportunity to meet again"

"How do we invite people, how do we go from hopes to dreams?"

"I like to be here. I like to hear stories about work that really make a difference"

"Projects of creating 2 spaces and invite people to experience alternative worlds. Challenging, but I feel more excited than tired"

"Dealing with Neo Liberalist 'disease' which is infecting everything"

"Confusion but positive for what is coming in the next days"

"I bring my practice of knowing how to walk in the dark"



WORKING WITH EMERGENCE

A core characteristic of the 3rd Network Meeting was the practice of working with emergence, those unforeseen, yet opportune moments that arise and cannot be predicted. An example of this was after the first afternoon, a storm hit the area, and there was a power cut. One member took the initiative to invite others to share some beers and shelter from the storm. Through the natural process of conversation and sharing, questions that matter to the C-Lab's future and individual members arose and another member shared her gift of 'reading' into these through a deck of cards. This became an important point of reference throughout the meeting and although completely unplanned and hosted spontaneously, this illustrates the power of a collective beginning to gather around what really matters and doing it in a light hearted yet serious way. The laughter and fun as well as authentic exchange built the strong container needed to be able to navigate the more turbulent and uncertain parts of the meeting later on.

Another example is when after a day and half of working with the uncertainty of what will happen with the C-Lab, a moment of opportunity arose where one of the Managing Directors of MitOst and the Co-ordinator of the MitOst Member and Alumni department could join the Network Meeting. This took place after a day of sharing stories about the prototypes and mobilities and where a session had taken place where we captured with more clarity the emerging identity of the CitizensLab. This became a spontaneous exchange between MitOst and the transition the organisation is going through and the C-Lab, not as a programme but an emerging field of practice and knowledge. It was a sensitive yet generative moment in the meeting when MitOst was thanked for 'birthing' the C-Lab and MitOst spoke of its own unclarity of what the C-Lab is and where it should continue to reside in MitOst. This exchange was not comfortable for anyone involved. Yet it marked an important point of maturation for all in how to work with complexity and uncertainty. A 'digestion' circle afterwards, helped to transform the emotions and the complexity into practical and more authentic perspectives of the way forward. This both strengthened and affirmed the resolve for continuing the C-Lab and wishing to find a win-win solution for all.



Annegret Wulff (Co-Managing Director), Kathrin Oertes (MitOst Members, Alumni, Network Department) and Alice Priori (CitizensLab Programme Coordinator) having a conversation with the CitizensLab members

WORKING WITH STORIES AND CAPTURING KNOWLEDGE

On the second day of the Network Meeting, a method known as Collective Story Harvesting¹ was used in order to review and capture what was being learned from the CitizensLab process so far. Five stories were shared and were listened to through using listening arcs that help to analyse and draw out the lessons learned. The questions/listening arcs used were:

- Which challenges have you met and how have you overcome them?
- What was really successful and made a change?
- What created the breakthrough points/pivots moments and what make that happen?
- Who supported you/who played a key role?
- What were real transformation points? (personal, in the group, in the community, in society...)
- What are the gaps and needs that are still present?



Maria Scordialos hosting the CitizensLab meeting and presenting the Collective Storytelling Harvesting

¹ This method was developed as part of the Art of Hosting Conversations that Matter, www.artofhosting.org

CITIZENSLAB STORY

the process of creating a community of societal transformation practitioners

This story begins one and a half year ago, when MitOst, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Stiftung Mercator and ECF (European Cultural Foundation) wanted to discover more about the new civil society emerging in Europe, explore the potential to create a more powerful movement to influence policy making at a European level and to create a MitOst 'Network of Networks'.

The first Network Meeting in Berlin was turbulent – literally 40 degrees of heat and it was like a sauna. Concentration was difficult and there was confusion on the purpose of the meeting which lead to many challenges. However, what did emerge was how much we wanted to work with self-organisation and this brought us together as a group. I also realized that the cross-sectorial and multi-thematic aspect of C-Lab made it complex but also unique. Not having a clear calling question as a purpose made things difficult though.

I wanted us to practice Participatory Leadership and I was involved in processes of negotiation taking in consideration the different interests at play. The Foundations believed that change happens through influencing politicians and policy makers, so they wanted us to create a Steering Group with 'high-level' people. CitizensLab Members came to the 1st Network Meeting with their own individual projects and wanting to learn with others but mainly for the purpose of their own work, not so much about collective impact for Europe. MitOst's need was to create a 'network of networks', although this was never clearly defined. However, the Steering Group was formed by members and this allowed us to develop things in a more participatory way, which allowed more ownership by the CitizensLab members. We also established Lumen as an online place to communicate and create, but it was initially silent. We are now sharing more content and we have done some online consensus voting but still it has so much more potential.

After attending Art of Hosting training I realized to have found a process to help us build the CitizensLab community and Julia, a colleague from MitOst introduced me to Maria as someone who co-initiated the Art of Hosting and could help with this more complex work.

At the 2nd Network Meeting, 20 new people joined and because of the way the meeting was designed and hosted, a more collective level began to emerge – how are our local practices and projects supporting societal change in Europe? The concepts of a community of practice, systemic change and prototypes entered, even though they were not fully owned by all. The prototypes were successful in getting us into collective action around topics and themes (connected to what the Steering Group had created) and mobilities took place in a more focused and conscious way. The website was also launched. These instruments generated more ownership and common identity.



Alice Priori narrates the CitizensLab story

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CITIZENSLAB STORY

the process of creating a community of societal transformation practitioners

Then we come to the transition - after we got the message that Stiftung Mercator would not fund the next cycle of the CitizensLab. The reason they gave us was that we did not have enough institutional members in the C-Lab, e.g. local government representatives, as they believed we needed to have more of the political and policy-making perspective. Robert Bosch Stiftung however said they would continue supporting us if CitizensLab would get more integrated into the MitOst network in fostering cohesion in Europe. Also the narrative of the 'network of networks' reappeared from within MitOst and that therefore, C-Lab should be connected with the Members and Alumni Network (M.A.N) as the approach could support more of a network of networks to emerge.

This exploration of connecting C-Lab with M.A.N into a new department that can act as a way of connecting all MitOst activities came at the time when the MitOst Festival was being planned so there was little time to fully discuss it and that is why we do not have more information for this 3rd Network Meeting. The main direction that has been discussed so far includes to:

- Change the CitizensLab membership to a more open process for MitOst members and alumni to engage according to their resonance to the collective investigation on societal transformation through civil society in Europe
- The CitizensLab name/brand might be changed into MitOst Lab or MitEurope Lab
- The key inquiry into societal transformation aspects as well as the instruments of network meetings (Forums), prototypes and rapid prototypes (previously mobilities) will remain

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“SKILL UP PROTOTYPE

not only a platform to access training opportunities but a process of changing our societal mindset

The story begins in Brussels and its real beginning rests with the people who are seeking refuge and crossed the sea, risking their lives. People who are trying to find safe harbour. People who are struggling to become a part of the community they arrive at. People who are suspended, in limbo. During the CitizensLab meeting in Brussels some of us started to exchange our different perspectives and ways of working and we clashed between us, yet this resulted in agreeing that there is one big issue that is most important for people who are seeking refuge – employment and a sense of purpose, professional development and skills development.

Seeing this together was a big challenge for us because none of us come from this specific area. This asked us to stretch our own skills. We saw that creating a platform to access opportunities for training was needed, but before this, we needed to meet people in person. So, we designed the first step, which was to meet as a team and meet immigrants in Bari. We hosted 40 refugees and asylum seekers, speaking different languages and coming mainly from different parts of the Africa, mostly young men.

We faced many challenges. People did not have any previous experience or concepts of designing and co-working, not collaborating or co-decision making. The participants were never exposed to these methods as they live in survival mode so what we were asking them to do was completely new for them. We had language barriers, even between our own team and with the participants. Thankfully between us we speak Italian, French and English. As a team, we had to work online and there were time constraints, time differences and different working methods.

We overcame these challenges by being patient, explaining and by using different simple, creative activities within a safe space. We found that a simple exercise like teaching each other to say hello in our native languages, transformed the environment as people felt proud and empowered to teach each other.

What was really successful and created a change was the realisation amongst participants that they can develop professional skills. This was a major realisation as many come from cultures that do not have this perception and therefore, do not believe it is possible. So one of the major outcomes of this work was changing the mindset of the participants, which immediately opens up new possibilities for them. We also noticed how much the place where we met and the approach we were using made them feel safe and at home so they could meet and work together.

A gap we identified is how to scale this up – we know it is possible and we are beginning to think of this. We are now letting others know about the first step we have taken and exploring how to translate the existing barriers and gaps into resources. Following the success of mindset change and creating the conditions for more of this to happen.



Margherita Mugnai and Laura Pana told us the story of the Skill Up Prototype



S. W. A. G.

Share ideas, Work together, Act now, Get involved

This prototype began a long time ago in terms of ideas and thinking about it. However, officially the kick-off meeting was in July 2017. We are now applying for an Erasmus + application so that we can continue it.

The CitizensLab 2nd Network Meeting in Brussels gave us the opportunity to shape our ideas and put them in a framework. We were no longer speaking about creating an education system in the future but speaking in the present of creating a tool. Using the resources of the prototype team we were able to envision developing a web-based tool in schools to practice active citizenship. This tool is now nearly ready and should go live in a few months.

At our Kick-Off Meeting in Athens, July 2017 the ideas emerged – but so did dreams and dragons. Our group dynamics fluctuated and we had different disagreements. However, we have come to realise that this is part of being in the C-Lab and is what is needed to co-create. In fact, working with this approach of talking things through allowed us to see other possibilities and options. Being able to meet in person allowed us to go deeper into the differences so that we could discover new perspectives. Apart from meeting in person, we also used online means for connecting and we had to find the right rhythm of how to do this.

Now we are looking at the sustainability of our idea and this is why we are seeking further funding through Erasmus+. In the process of writing the project application we are also including young people so that we ensure we position it according to what they see.

Finally – we wanted to give this prototype a name and brand – and so we came up with SWAG – which stands for Share ideas, Work together, Act now, Get involved. We decided to not put anything about education or active citizenship in the title because we believe that citizens are already active! Instead we need to ask how we want to be as citizens! This prototype is also about changing and reframing this term 'active citizenship'.



We began by watching a video of the SWAG meeting in Athens.



SWAG team presenting their prototype
(from the left side: Pavlina Petrova, Ed Santman, Angeliki Tseliou, Lilian Juechtern)

This prototype is about connecting social responsibility and participatory budgeting for the creation of more transparent budgets. The focus is on budgeting on a local level. Specifically, we are approaching this on a modular way for better data gathering and use, so that the result is socially responsible budgets on the local level. Therefore the main partners in this prototype are local governments adopting a participatory budgeting process.

We are designing a tool, but behind the technology is a social and local process. This is a multi-stakeholder process with civil society actors, journalists, academics, public service, etc. coming together.

Why are we doing this prototype? It is a difficult transition to move from where we are with budgets to transparency. The local level offers many opportunities, mainly because to practice democracy, we need a small scale where people can directly take part. So if we can create new stories of different local contexts, it can create a local domino effect. People will see that we have the same problems with many different solutions.

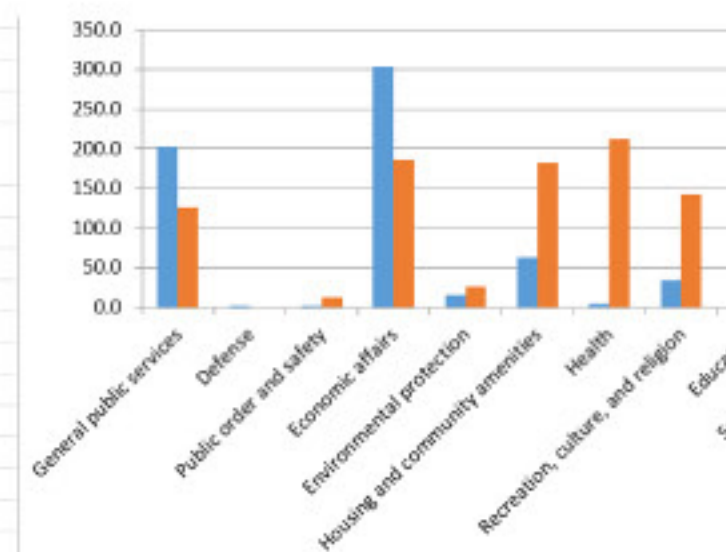
We are developing an interactive tool where common data can be gathered. This will support local authorities to update their information and modernise. This tool will foster the conditions for this to happen. We held our first meeting in Budapest and we did a mock-up which we are not yet ready to share. We opened up some big questions but we do not yet have the solutions. Questions such as (1) How do we face the complexity of budget analysis?, (2) How do we keep things simple for the user?, (3) What kind of infographics are needed and can we embed multi-media technology?, (4) How do we engage and involve third parties, e.g. Press, Universities, local authorities, citizens? We want to find a way of offering information that is not general as this does not relate to people's lives.

We are beginning to explore a comparative analysis between two places, e.g. Zagreb and Belgrade. The initial idea of this prototype was a large scale comparative budget analysis. However at this level it is not relevant for citizens and the local level. This was a breakthrough moment for us to shift it from this meta and more theoretical level to a more local level. This is how budgets then become more specific for people's lives. Yet we are in the dilemma of how to do this? Do we do it with a lot of collaboration? Do we do it with a lot of money? Do we do it modularly? We are still finding our way but working with analytics, making it simple, participatory and transparent decision making processes.



Francesco Saija presents the We budget prototype

	Belgrade		Zagreb	
Census 2011	1,659,440		790,017	
Revenues per capita (in EUR)	459		1,234	
Classification of Expense by Function of Government	61			
	Belgrade	in %	Zagreb	in %
General public services	202.6	25.2	126.0	10.3
Defense	0.7	0.1	0.0	0.0
Public order and safety	0.8	0.1	13.1	1.1
Economic affairs	303.2	37.7	186.3	15.3
Environmental protection	15.4	1.9	26.0	2.1
Housing and community amenities	63.3	7.9	181.6	14.9
Health	4.2	0.5	212.6	17.4
Recreation, culture, and religion	34.3	4.3	143.1	11.7
Education	144.6	18.0	248.1	20.4
Social protection	36.1	4.5	81.6	6.7
Total:	805.4	100	1,218.5	100.0



Belgrade and Zagreb municipal budgets data



“NETWORK NAVIGATOR

In Brussels during the 2nd Network Meeting, there was a burst of energy to create the Network Navigator as a way of helping people to navigate around existing networks. After this we met online and had several calls and we appeared to be on the same page. Then we met in Rome and it was great to be together and in a new environment. We realised that we were not all on the same page, so we went round several circles. We had different views and we would come to some clarity and then lose it again! We found that eating pizza, drinking together and just being in good space together created the right conditions for us to also create together.

The result was that we deconstructed the original idea as we saw that there are different network eco-systems and that by connecting them, the potential for creating synergistic properties could be greater. So, we began to ask ourselves what would a network of networks offer if we better understand how the eco-systems of networks work together. Therefore, there was a shift from the original goal of trying to produce a map of networks to producing a tool that will help to navigate the complexity of networks that operate in different thematic field and sectors. The goal now is not just to show the network or networks but also the relationship between networks.

We are currently holding the question, “How can we work with complexity when things are constantly moving?”

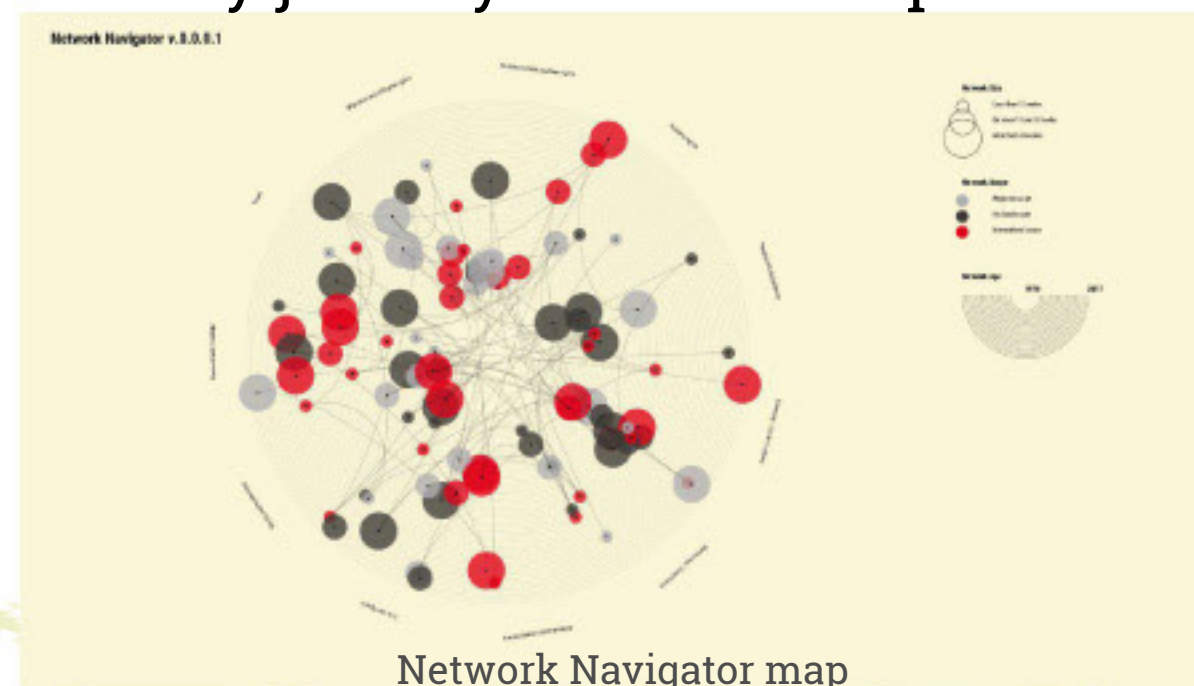
We have different roles in the group – how do we use the resources we have in the best way? How do we collectively share the leadership and take decisions? Time is a constant tension – not having enough of it. Yet we are not giving up and we want to make this more tangible.

We decided to create a survey to collect information about existing networks. We sent it to other C-Lab members and others organizations and networks and got for the moment 26 responses. The questionnaire was helpful in gathering information about networks as well as qualitative information such as which networks do you admire. It was interesting to find that people admire networks they are not a part of. We noticed that the line between organisations and networks is blurry and we saw that there is a difference between temporary and permanent networks. The questionnaire is showing that perhaps a network is something that deals with the complexity that an organisation cannot work with. The survey was difficult to fill in but it allowed people to reflect on aspects about networks that we never think about.

“This prototype and Citizens Lab is allowing me to define my journey of what Europe is and what it means to be a part of it!”



Louise, David and Ale offered the story of the Network Navigator.



Network Navigator map

REVEALING THE C-LAB'S IDENTITY

On the third day of the Meeting, we reviewed the learnings captured through the listening arcs and together we revealed more of what the CitizensLab is, its identity and work:



Midwives of a new Europe

(pollinating, take actions, track patterns towards a new Europe requires a mental shift)



New structure of civil society



People who use trust as the connective tissue to get things done



Voice givers to questions that create mutual responsibility



Practitioners of democracy

THE MOST SUCCESSFUL ELEMENTS C-LAB ACHIEVED AND MADE A CHANGE ARE:

Practicing collective leadership processes, co-shape and take responsibility creating a feeling of co-ownership

Physical and face to face meetings are key to take the time and space to merge and emerge

Challenges became opportunities

Storytelling as a powerful tool to make visible the invisible connecting tissue of civil society and transformative processes (to translate & communicate it to the wider society)

Have the time to fail, reflect, take collective actions

We are working on complex answers to complex questions

Each prototype gets us closer to a meaningful life-changing result

Work and struggle together in all our diversity and complexity

OPENING UP TO THE WIDER ECO-SYSTEM OF MITOST MEMBERS

As part of testing the opening of the C-Lab to the wider MitOst Members&Alumni eco-system, an Open Space was held linking the five themes of the MitOst Festival and introducing the C-Lab approach. The C-Lab was offered as an approach for testing systemic change and the question, "What ideas do we want to explore now that could become prototypes of societal change?" was suggested as the framework where topics could be posted and discussed. The following topics emerged:

- Education - connecting schools and communities
- Self-Knowledge
- Sport for social change
- Institution hacking and communication for participatory democracy
- How to create a more vibrant and participatory MitOst Network?
- Walk the Talk - how to have more meaningful and sustainable events
- The Globals - Weaving a global decentralised values-based Network of Networks
- New forms of reception with and for refugees and asylum seekers



Open Space with CitizensLab and MitOst Festival participants
on "What ideas do we want to explore now that could become prototypes of societal change?"

Although ideas of new prototypes were being invited, from the topics discussed there were no new prototypes. However new linkages with existing prototypes were made, beginning the process of integrating MitOst members and alumni into CitizensLab as a format within the wider Network.

CONVERGING, MAKING SENSE, AND MOVING FORWARD

On the final day, the time was taken to explore the question, “What do we now do...practically”. Again Open Space was used as the method and several topics were called and decisions were taken. These included:

- Sharing with MitOst ways in which it can modernise the Festival and its events
- Two new prototypes were called and need to go through the process of being mandated
- CitizensLab strategy into the transition of being included in the M.A.N. department includes several proposals:
 - Do not give up the name CitizensLab (we are all citizens doing labs in Europe!)
 - Create a narrative of what we have ‘achieved’ with videos and interviews
 - Organize Zoom calls (webinars) to involve new people to the prototypes, then they sign up in LUMEN
 - Create a ‘MitOst group’ that helps with the restructuring of the M.A.N Department and the transition of CitizensLab
 - Form a group to seek for additional funds

NEXT STEPS

- Each prototype group to communicate with Alice the actual expenditures in order to finalize Stiftung Mercator budget before 31.10.17 (-> ratified by Mercator decision to prolong project phase until 30.04.2018)
- Share results of the 3rd network meeting with all C-Labbers
- Share results of the Strategic meeting between Alice, Kathrin and Lisa on the new M.A.N. department structure
- Alice to share new application forms to apply for prototypes and rapid prototypes
- Define process and criteria to allocate the budget for new prototypes and rapid prototypes (previous mobilities)
- Define process and criteria to include new MitOst members and alumni to the CitizensLab
- Create a MitOst group to steer the process of strategizing M.A.N. department
- Identify hosting team to co-design and host the CitizensLab Forum meeting in March/April 2018
- Identify location for the CitizensLab forum meeting in March/April 2018



 C-Lab meeting

 MitOst Festival

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