



# **MAKING ART – TAKING PART! NEGOTIATING PARTICIPATION AND THE PLAYFUL OPENING OF LIMINAL SPACES IN A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS**

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# KEYWORDS

PARTICIPATION, LIMINAL SPACES, ARTISTIC INTERVENTION, CRITICAL ART EDUCATION, PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

# ABSTRACT

HOW CAN WE OPEN PARTICIPATORY SPACES PLAYFULLY AND CRITICALLY? OUR ARTICLE RAISES THIS QUESTION IN THE CONTEXT OF A RESEARCH PROJECT AT THE INTERSECTION OF PARTICIPATORY AND INTERVENTIONIST ART, CRITICAL ART EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH. IN THE PROJECT "MAKING ART – TAKING PART!" ([WWW.TAKINGPART.AT](http://WWW.TAKINGPART.AT)), WHICH THE AUTHORS, ALONG WITH ADDITIONAL TEAM MEMBERS, CONDUCTED WITH STUDENTS AGED 14–16 IN SALZBURG, AUSTRIA, AN ARTISTIC INTERVENTION IN PUBLIC SPACE WAS DEVELOPED BASED ON THE IDEAS, EXPERIENCES, AND DESIRES OF THE STUDENTS. IN A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS, WE EXPLORED STRATEGIES FOR SELF-EMPOWERMENT, DECONSTRUCTION OF ESTABLISHED KNOWLEDGE AND POWER RELATIONS, AND APPROPRIATION BY ARTISTIC AND ART MEDIATION MEANS AROUND THE TOPIC OF "LIVING TOGETHER". IN THIS PAPER, WE ARGUE THAT BY EMPLOYING SUCH STRATEGIES, A LIMINAL SPACE CAN BE OPENED – IN A PLAYFUL, YET CRITICAL WAY – IN WHICH THE MEANING OF PARTICIPATION IS COLLABORATIVELY NEGOTIATED.

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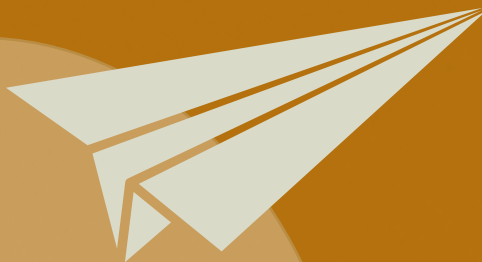






Figure 1: Pick a Question, Pick a Phrase (photo: Pia Streicher)

## Introduction

*A student holds a basket of cards printed with phrases. She invites a woman walking by to draw a card from the basket. The woman is curious; she takes a card that reads, “Live like there’s no tomorrow” and laughs. The student then asks her to pick one or more matching questions from another set of cards suspended from a clothesline, but she would rather pick a question that she likes. She chooses “WHO says what is beautiful or ugly?” A conversation ensues between student and passer-by.*

How can we open a space in which participation is negotiated in a critical, yet playful way? The game “Pick a Question, Pick a Phrase” was a public experiment in the context of the “Making Art – Taking Part!” research project. The rules of the game, along with its public presentation, were developed in a collaborative process between the students and the project team. In educational contexts, it is often considered risky to collaborate with students on an equal footing, but this is a precondition if we are to take the term “participation” seriously. While the essence of taking part lies in the collaborative process between all project members, in the context of a research project, the project initiators and team need to give prompts and keep the focus on achieving a result. This raises many questions about how to open and shape a participatory space, but also when and how to close this space. In this paper, we argue that, through a collaborative process in which knowledge is negotiable and all parties involved are open to change, a temporary in-between space can be opened. This space allows a liminal experience in which the meaning of participation is explored playfully and by artistic means.

We – a four-person interdisciplinary team representing the University of Salzburg and the Mozarteum Salzburg

art and music university – carried out the “Making Art – Taking Part!” ([www.takingpart.at](http://www.takingpart.at)) project in Salzburg, Austria, with students between the ages of 14 and 16. In this project, we experimented with, negotiated and investigated strategies and options for self-empowerment and social participation in collaboration with the students. This paper, written by two of the project team members, represents our reflections on the project as it unfolded at one of the partner schools. We focus, firstly, on the collaborative process in which the meaning of participation was explored and negotiated and, secondly, on the opening of liminal spaces in conjunction with playful artistic interventions.

In this process, we were constantly confronted with the question of what the limits of participation are, in society, in the project setting, and in each individual situation.

What unites the approaches of participatory and interventionist art, critical art education<sup>1</sup>, and participatory research is the intention to open up a space for action and a shared space of experience in order to collaboratively question societal power relations and act in a self-empowered way. We understand education in the tradition of critical and radical pedagogy as a process of self-empowerment<sup>2</sup> and politicization (Freire, [1970] 1978; hooks, 1990). In this interpretation, it is the objective of education to contribute to the development of emancipatory strategies. Both critical art education and participatory research, in the tradition of action research, are built upon this emancipatory concept of education. Even in the field of participatory art, there is an emergence of artistic approaches that are enmeshed with emancipatory claims in education (Bishop, 2012, p. 241–274).

The concepts of “collaboration” and “participation” have spread widely in recent years in society, education and art (Bishop, 2012; Kester, 2011; Milevska, 2006/2015; Miessen, 2010; Terkessidis, 2015). While they have often been evoked as goals, these have rarely been fulfilled (Terkessidis, 2015, p. 12). Participation is an ambivalent term that is commonly linked with creating access and visibility for marginalized groups and holds the dilemma of hierarchies: who has the power to decide who may or may not participate and what format the participation should take? Collaboration is associated more directly with working together on an equal footing, as the term itself implies no power position, and the focus is on working together toward a shared objective within a given timeframe.<sup>3</sup> Mark Terkessidis argues that, in contrast to “cooperation”, in which actors meet to work together but dissolve afterwards into their own units, “collaboration” is much more difficult, and involves “working together in such a way that those involved accept they will change during the process, and even welcome this change” (2015, p. 14). In education, collaboration means a process in which all of the parties involved – teachers and students alike – are changed (p. 120), and where the teachers’ knowledge is negotiable (p. 128). Terkessidis sets collaboration as a guiding principle through which individuals see themselves as emancipated and become what he calls “a multiplicity”. Multiplicity, in turn, stands at the core of society; he argues: “Society only functions if, through collaboration, as many voices as possible are heard” (Terkessidis, 2015, p. 13). Such considerations, and the questions that arise from them, have formed the starting point for the “Making Art – Taking Part!” project and this article.

This article is organized as follows: at the outset, we present our main theoretical foundations and explain the context of liminal space in conjunction with artistic intervention. From there, drawing upon the situations described in the case study, we discuss the collaborative process of negotiation of participation and the playful aspects. In the conclusion, we come back to our argument. The present article is the result of our reflections in the team process. In this respect, its preparation represents a consolidation of the mutual exchange of ideas with project team members Elke Smolics and Veronika Aqra, as well as with the artist Moira Zoitl, who was partially involved.

1) In German the terms “critical art mediation” and “cultural mediation” are more commonly used (see Institute for Art Education of Zurich University of the Arts 2013, Mörsch 2013).

2) “Empowerment” is a difficult term that has frequently been challenged due to its indication of power position (see Johnston-Arthur n.d.). We concur with bell hooks’ understanding of the term (1990).

3) The conceptual relation between the terms “participation” and “collaboration” need further research.

## The “Making Art – Taking Part!” Project

The research project *Making Art – Taking Part! Artistic and Cultural Interventions by and with Young People for the Production of Participatory Publics* ([www.takingpart.at](http://www.takingpart.at)) is a collaboration between universities and schools with the requirement of undertaking participatory research.<sup>4</sup> It was carried out in cooperation with two schools in Salzburg, Austria, over a period of two years (2014–16) (in this article we focus on one school). The project explores the possibilities for young people to take part in artistic and cultural production. The research question is: how can young people experiment with and create participatory public(s) through the development and implementation of artistic and cultural interventions? Central to the project is a *shared* learning process for everyone involved (students, project team, project partners) out of which we can develop educational materials for classroom lessons and extracurricular work.<sup>5</sup>

In the first year, we cooperated with the Neue Mittelschule Liefering in Salzburg (a secondary school or lower high school) over the course of one school year. The school is a Montessori school with integrated classes, selected for the project because of its location on the (economic and social) margins of the (wealthy) city of Salzburg, in an area with a predominantly working class population from a variety of cultural backgrounds, and with many residents in a precarious socio-economic situation. The class had 25 students from eleven countries of origin. This included three extracurricular students (refugees), who are required to learn German within two years of their arrival in Austria, as well as two students with learning disabilities and three students with special educational needs. Because it is a Montessori school, two to four teachers work within each class as a team. From February to June 2015, a monthly half-day workshop and, in July, four presentation days were held at the university campus, the school, and in the surrounding districts. In the monthly workshops, we collaboratively defined a research question, with the young people developing the discussion framework from their own ideas, experiences, and desires.

The project was roughly divided into three phases. The first phase was devoted to introducing strategies of deconstruction and intervention; the second phase involved the self-directed negotiation of the interventions; and the third phase saw the implementation of a jointly defined artistic intervention in a public space. The participatory research process was conceived as an open setting. For each meeting, the workshop facilitators (university team and artists) decided on the design of the workshop modules, including the design of situations, each with specific mediation tools and opportunities for participation.

## Theoretical foundations

The main theoretical foundations of this paper are three-fold: participatory and interventionist art, critical art education, and participatory research. These foundations also reflect the interdisciplinary composition of the research team. Our understanding of interdisciplinarity is based upon the bricolage approach (Kincheloe 2001) whereby disciplinary boundaries are crossed and the research perspectives are negotiated throughout the collaborative process.

4) This project was funded through the “Sparkling Science” program of the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy ([www.takingpart.at](http://www.takingpart.at)). This paper has been a joint effort between the authors. In the spirit of team collaboration, we are rotating the order of the authors’ names in joint publications. We would also like to acknowledge Elke Smolcs’ important contribution.

5) The project builds on the results of a science communication project ([www.makingart.at](http://www.makingart.at)).

## Participation and intervention in the context of critical artistic practices

Participation and intervention are commonly used buzzwords in contemporary art, but they have also become a type of conceptual fetish (Graham/Vass, 2014) and are celebrated as “radical chic”, in part without actually fulfilling the “promise of democratization and emancipation” (Milevska, 2015). Particularly since the 1960s and ’70s, artists have been grappling with diverse artistic strategies of participation (Bishop, 2012; Feldhoff, 2012; Hildebrandt, 2013; Milevska, 2006/2015) and intervention (von Borries et al., 2012; Mouffe 2008; Wege, 2001). These strategies are part of the genealogy of an expanded concept of art, which constantly renegotiates the boundaries between art and life (Wege, 2014). In the 1990s, a “participatory turn” in art was declared (Ziese, 2010, p. 72), in which a variety of socially engaged practices and relational art practices (e.g. new genre public art, community art) became visible, revealing new ways of communication and collaboration. If we understand participatory and interventionist artistic practices as means of democratizing society or of creating a democratic society, as addressed by Suzana Milevska (2015), then we can ask what the possibilities and limitations of such practices are in the context of our current neoliberal societies.

## Deconstruction and unlearning in the context of critical art education

With the goal of enabling cultural participation for as many social groups as possible, numerous strategic and methodological tools have been developed within art education. Critical art education (or in the German context “critical art mediation”, see, for example, Institute for Art Education, 2013; Settele/Mörsch, 2012) deals with important questions about learning concerning the interconnections between learning and hegemonic relationships, as well as the breaking and shattering of learned practices and established knowledge, in order to open up spaces for dissent and possibilities of the unexpected (Sternfeld, 2014). As such, power relations correlate with learning processes; they are learned and performed daily, and reproduced or subverted in this way. Powerful knowledge can therefore be deconstructed – in the sense of a performative subversion – in pedagogical or art education activities (Sternfeld 2014).

The “educational turn in curating” (Rogoff [2008], 2013) and the “educational turn in education” (Jaschke/Sternfeld, 2012, p. 18) have brought art mediation as a critical practice to the foreground, especially in connection with critical and radical approaches to education. This involves recognizing the equivalence of different forms of knowledge (such as knowledge gained through experience and academic knowledge) and the (self-) reflexive approach to unequal power relations between all actors involved (see Landkammer, 2012).

## Participatory research in the context of social intervention

Whenever participatory research is mentioned, the question soon arises of *to what end* this research is taking place. Is the goal of such research to describe and reproduce the social environment – or to change it? The terms “participative research”, “action research”, “team research”, “participatory action research”, “community-based participatory research”, etc., describe different genealogies and approaches to participatory research practices, which all have in common the claim of intervening in social contexts and changing them through collaborative research (see Reason/Bradbury, 2001; Kindon/Pain/Kesby, 2010). They call into question the defining power of the researcher and the academic institution and share a desire to step out of the ivory tower. Participatory research in the tradition of action research directs the focus of attention more on the idea of participation than on action (see von Unger, 2014, p. 3). Hella von Unger sees participatory research as an example of how to shift boundaries between scholarship and society and create new – collaborative – forms of knowledge production

(von Unger, 2014, p. 6). The recurring cycle of action and reflection in the research process produces situational knowledge, which is transferable as an experience and can be seen as a component of processes of education and politicization. Von Unger argues that participatory research starts with the collaborative deconstruction and questioning of power relations. Approaches to participatory research have also been addressed in the field of critical art education (Mörsch, 2013; Landkammer, 2012). Overall, participatory research is a constitutive part of a set of methods for socio-critical, participatory educational, and cultural work.

## Theoretical context

Given these starting points, we now define the theoretical context of the playful opening of spaces more precisely according to the concept of liminality. The term “liminal space” denotes movement and friction. It is a space that can be understood in the sense of a “third space of alternative enunciation” (Soja, 2009, p. 58), as has been elaborated within postcolonial theory. Some theorists see liminality and marginality as viewpoints on the social-spatial periphery, from which specific criticism of the experience and knowledge of the actors can be formulated (hooks, 1990; Soja, 2009; Bhabha, 1994). Victor Turner ([1969]1989) describes liminality (from the Latin *limen*, “threshold”) as a state of unstable intermediate existence, which is marked by the transition and redefinition of identity, thus opening up spaces for experimentation, play, and innovation. The liminal experience implies a state of movement and the continuous updating of social relations and structures, with reference to their social construction and thus their changeability.

Paula M. Hildebrandt (2013) takes the continuous negotiation and updating or altering of social and power relations, which is an aspect of liminality, and connects it with artistic intervention (see also Erika Fischer-Lichte, 2004). For this purpose, Hildebrandt focuses on the moment of instigation and summarizes intervention as a strategy or form of participation. By this she means the negotiation of community and/or coexistence. She sees an intervention as a moment of “turning points and points of departure” (in German: “*Umbrüche und Aufbrüche*”, p. 147) and asks: “What opportunities arise through this potentiality of a continuous new beginning for processes of articulation and expression of democratic self-determination?” (ibid). Conceptualizing artistic interventions as liminal experiences “departs from binary thinking patterns, the either–or, and focuses on the tilting moment of the in-between” (p. 157). This produces, as Hildebrandt argues, a “deciding situation to evoke an experience of passing through, of pausing and passing over – a liminal experience” (ibid). Interventions open up and create in-between spaces, in which questions about inclusion and exclusion can be articulated (p. 148).

What interests us in particular is the playful aspect of the liminal experience and the opening of liminal spaces. Alongside ritual, Turner mentions play as a social construct set apart from the everyday and, as such, enabling liminal experiences. The concept of liminality thus points toward the concept of transformation. Our perception of the playful opening of liminal spaces builds on Hans-Georg Gadamer’s thinking on the analogy of play and understanding ([1960], 2000). For him, both play and understanding are based on a “back-and-forth process” between the participating players or between two people wishing to communicate with and understand each other. This “back-and-forth process of engagement”, whether in the process of play or in the event of understanding, is described by Gadamer as a transformative process (Vilhauer, 2013, p. 78). For Gadamer, the playful aspect is crucial to creating, in dialogue with each other, an event that is transformative for those involved. A transformative experience is possible only if we are willing to engage in open exchange with the “other” and his or her construction of meaning (p. 82).

The intention of our project was to open up in-between spaces of experience and agency, and possibly transformation, within the social microcosm of the school. We use the concept of “liminality” here to describe this opening of an in-between space through strategies of artistic intervention and art mediation. Based on Hildebrandt’s considerations of the liminal character of artistic intervention and its possibilities for articulating processes of democratic participation, we turn now to the case study to examine how we collaboratively and playfully negotiated moments of deconstruction and self-empowerment, and in what ways our interventions made liminal experiences possible.



## Case study with project situations

Below we present two project situations. The aim is to bring out different aspects of the collaborative negotiation and exploration process of participation and to reflect on moments in which liminal spaces were playfully opened through strategies of deconstruction, intervention, and appropriation.

### *Écriture automatique* and asking questions

*“Why are the teachers here?” This question was asked by a girl in the context of the “écriture automatique” mediation strategy in the first phase of the project. Somewhat reluctantly, and with a red face, she answered her own question: “Because they have to be here!” Her answer provoked boisterous laughter from her classmates, teachers and from us. This simple question already indicates a questioning of social interaction, as well as hierarchies and power relations, which was to arise again throughout the course of the project.*

The project team adapted the method of *écriture automatique* (automatic writing), developed by the Surrealists, into a game and used it as a stimulus and introduction to the critical interrogative phase. We listed question words (why, how, what, for what, how long, whereto, wherefrom), and for each word the students wrote down a question on a sheet of paper. They then folded the paper to hide the question and passed it to the person sitting next to them. We repeated the sequence seven times – with chaotic interjections throughout, due to congestion in passing down the list, words not having been understood either acoustically or linguistically, or cheerful confusion about the game as it progressed. We cut the final list into separate strips, each with a question on it, which we collected and mixed up. Then each person drew a question at random, read it out loud, and answered it. The questions ranged from spontaneous, fun questions to more profound questions, such as “Why do we have school?”, “Why are we doing this?”, “What are we learning?”, “How did you come to Austria?” or the above-mentioned “Why are the teachers here?”

We tested this strategy of mediation in the first phase of the project in order to initiate a questioning of power structures and to create an interactive setting that facilitated an experience of equal exchange. Our main intention in this first phase was to initiate activities and discussions, which would communicate to the students that this process was about opening up shared spaces for action, discussion, and the joint negotiation of the “rules of play” (Sternfeld, 2012) for the project.

Activities took on various forms, which, due to their playful and joyful character, differed from academic learning through classroom instruction or even group work (including the independent work common in Montessori schools). Writing under time pressure, folding the sheet of paper (to conceal the newly written question), and passing the paper to the next produced a certain dynamic between thought and action, which, in a simplified way, mirrored the cycle of reflection and action as structured by the action research process and made it tangible in a different form. The assumption that there was only one correct answer, as well as the fear of not getting it right, was deconstructed in this game. As such, we consider the adaptation of *écriture automatique* – the asking of questions in conjunction with the strategy of deconstruction – to be a playful experiment, which temporarily opened up a liminal space.

## Project presentation – strategies of intervention and appropriation

*“We are all different” is written in large letters on foam cubes which the students are holding up with both arms. A group photo is taken and shortly after the foam cubes are flying through the air and*



*a lively atmosphere spreads. Students are talking to their visitors about the project activities, about the topics addressed and the content of this intervention in a public space.*

In the final four intensive days of the project, we collaboratively developed an intervention in a public space and implemented it as part of the project presentation. To accomplish this, we – the project team – evaluated the topics introduced by the students in the preceding workshops. The topic of inequality – and with it the question of “How to live together?” – emerged as a constant theme. Over the course of the project, the young people chose to focus on two aspects of “living together” (in the sense of “coexistence”): the creation of inequalities – including the contradictions of living together and the demands of the educational and social systems – and their future visions of another society.

Based on this, we chose the idea of “living together” as the central concept for our intervention. In order to develop the content of the intervention, we discussed in small groups the concepts of protest, language, stereotypes, racism, and anti-racism based on a glossary developed by the art mediation collective *trafo.K* (2009). We asked: “What important information is contained in the text? What action strategies and counter-strategies can we find to use against exclusion?” The visions of the future were developed through conversations on what living together can/could look like. Based on the students’ ideas from the preceding workshops, the project team suggested the construction of a mobile information stand as a mediation tool, which could be thought of as a “swap meet” (of ideas, materials, etc.), and, from here, to initiate activities to involve passers-by in substantive exchanges. Additional mediation tools were also developed based on the students’ ideas: an installation with foam cubes, a photographic “gesture alphabet”, and discussion prompts on cards with a choice of phrases and questions for people to pick, as well as small badges the students would make themselves to pin on clothes or bags. The mobile info stand with different display options was designed and built by a carpenter with the help of a group of students (see figure 2).



Figure 2: Mobile info stand (photo: Pia Streicher)

6) However, in the form it was presented, it also holds a problematic aspect insofar as the photographs could be read simply as illustrative of the terms or vice versa.



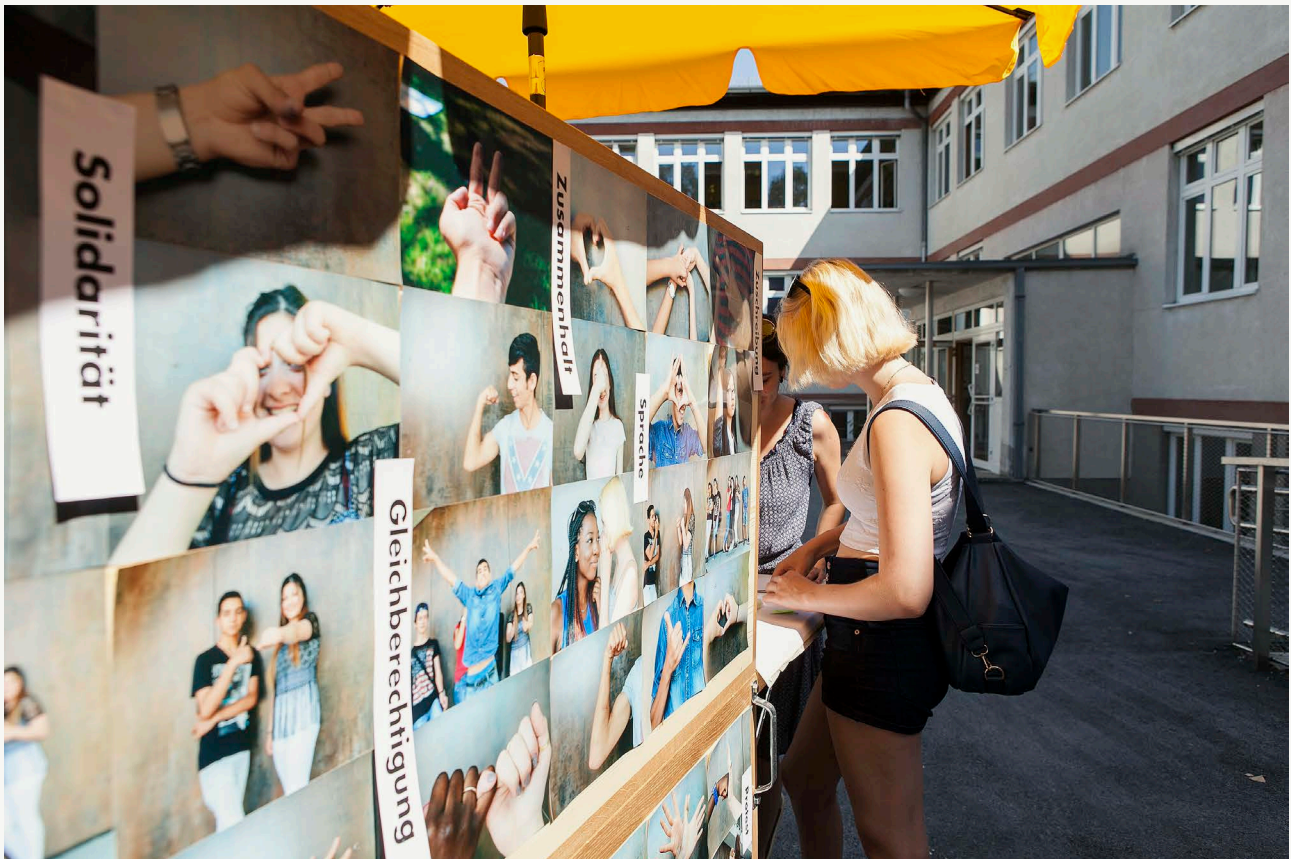


Figure 5: Gesture alphabet (photo: Pia Streicher)

The phrases and questions to pick, as well as the badges, were designed as additional mediation and interaction tools on the topic of “living together”. The phrases were initially developed by a group of students, who came up with phrases such as “Live like there’s no tomorrow”, “Don’t worry – be happy”, “Smile ‘cause life’s too short”, which they printed on colored cards. However, these were perceived by the project team as rather simplistic and system-affirmative. As a result, it was decided jointly to formulate more incisive questions, such as “Who defines success?”, “Why does prejudice exist?”, “Who says what is beautiful or ugly?” and combine these with the original phrases in order to create a “tilting moment” and open up an in-between space of critical discourse. During the intervention, the students asked passers-by to choose a question from a basket and to either answer it themselves or choose an answer or phrase from cards suspended from a clothesline.

The students also operated the badge machine, which was installed on the mobile info stand. Visitors to the stand were able to choose badges made by the students and inscribed with words or phrases such as “Equality”, “Peace”, “Claim your rights”, or “Be open”. Or they could create their own badges with words or phrases of their own choosing. The badge machine was very popular with the students. Partly because it made it easy to produce something tangible, which they could take with them, and partly because knowing how to operate the machine put the students on a more equal footing and gave them a sense of certainty in their interactions with other students and the public.

The project presentation and intervention in a public space took place on the last day of the project, beginning in the school forecourt. After about an hour, the stand was moved to its second station, the Salzburg City Library. Two teachers and their classes arrived by bus to see the intervention. The project class conveyed the project outcome to the other students with great enthusiasm and led informal discussions on the project. The experience of going public, and especially the search for an unmediated public beyond the school, seemed to give the students a sense of appropriation and empowerment. The students confidently adopted the role of mediators

and described the intervention and the project to their visitors, explaining what they had done, why, and what it meant. In this respect, the intervention represented a special moment of self-empowerment and appropriation in which – at least for some students – the role reversal, from learners to empowered agents who were able to explain themselves, became apparent.

Furthermore, the collaborative process was crucial for the entire project, and this was acknowledged by the students in statements like: “Working together as a team was fun”, “We learned a lot of new things through the project, like that we get along with others better and can work together with others and come up with a good result”, and “We definitely have come closer together as a class.”

We see the described formats as artistic mediation tools that we experimented with and explored with various audiences. For our objective of enabling an emancipatory appropriation of public space by the students, it was important to establish a kind of informal knowledge exchange and to avoid a hierarchical presentation situation. In subsequent interviews, the students said that they experienced the interaction with the passers-by as overwhelmingly positive and interesting. A female student said: “Somehow the best thing was to see the response of the people.” Another student mentioned the badges: “Some people took the badges we made. They found our questions amusing. So, basically, we have only had positive feedback.”

## Discussion

What kind of in-between space has been opened over the course of the project, and how? Three main issues emerged: first, the issue of participation and collaboration; second, the issue of authorship; and third, the issue of long-term benefits, the latter two in the particular context of collaborative processes.

First, what does it mean to take part and to collaborate in a project? This became the main question when reflecting on the process. In retrospect, we can determine that the young people stipulated a substantive discussion, in which we as a project team opened an experimental space for their perspectives and experiences. Our task was to create this space for the exploration of processes of participation and appropriation anew at every meeting and to renegotiate it *together* each time. However, taking part in such a process also has its limitations and challenges. How long should the space be open and when should it be closed? Who should take on this task? And this, then, also begs the question of who speaks? In whose interest? And who takes responsibility?

The self-reflexive analysis nevertheless produced some challenges: throughout the project, we, as the project team, made the decisions on the (visual) representation and artistic realization, and predominantly set the “rules of play” (Sternfeld, 2012). In this, we built on the students’ ideas and made suggestions to open up the space for activities, which the young people appropriated and shaped. Proceeding from critical art education and emancipatory pedagogy, we understood education itself as an object of deconstruction and potential transformation. Given that the project concerned the testing and research of participatory processes, reflection on the project process was an important aspect. In group interviews, as well as in the plenary sessions, we discussed processes, progress, themes, and mediation tools. The students did not always accept our suggestions (such as when we proposed they use a research diary as a tool for reflection). However, the aspiration to implement an exchange of knowledge on an equal footing was only partially possible, given the existing structural hierarchies between a university-based project team with real and symbolic capital and pupils from marginalized schools and communities with little resources.

When and where did the moment of inquiring and experimenting happen for the students – and when did they appropriate the strategies offered by us and saturated them with their own content and meaning? The concept of liminal space allows us to focus on the “turning points and points of departure” (Hildebrandt, 2013) through the strategies of deconstruction and intervention. *Turning points* were visible in phases of deconstruction and discussion, which, for example, were characterized by such statements as “I can do that!” or “Now I get it. The point is that we create the place in such a way that we like it.” *Points of departure* were visible during interventions and the appropriation of public space as well as in the position of the speakers as mediators of their intervention.



Spaces for action were opened up through the strategy of deconstruction, particularly by asking questions during the project process. From the outset, we asked questions and urged the students to ask their own questions as well: of themselves, of each other, of us, and of society. This asking of questions emerged in the process as a planned methodological approach as well as through the spontaneous modification of methods and at the students' request. The process of developing the interventions in the public space encompassed the entire duration of the project – from the negotiation of strategies for intervention to testing these to the final implementation of their own intervention. The moment when the project went public and students started interacting with visitors triggered processes of appropriation and self-empowerment through speaking in public and mediating the project outcomes. We understand the collaborative process as an ongoing challenge and take it as a lesson learned, teaching us that we need to take more time to collaboratively reflect on the participatory research process and to develop the intervention strategies.

One first and crucial “rupture of habitual practices” (p. 147) took place at the beginning of the project, when a change of venue to the university campus created a new framework. Leaving the familiar school surroundings to seek out unknown places as well as working mainly in small groups facilitated the deconstruction of customary structures. During the second phase, we held events at the school in order to ascertain the students' expertise of their local area. However, this led to the school rules asserting themselves on the project, from fixed break times, to the ringing of the bell, to general rules of conduct in the school building. Altogether, the (physical) space of the school as well as the rules and regulations connected with it clearly limited the potential to initiate and open liminal spaces through the activities and interventions of the project.

But in which ways was there playful engagement with participation? We assume that the playful aspect in the negotiation of taking part holds transformative potential insofar as it offers a new approach to their everyday surroundings, which – without serving a specific purpose – allows them to detect and deconstruct norms in order to experience a change of these norms and power relations. We created situations in the project, which gave the students the opportunity to experiment with different types of behavior and ways of thinking in an unfamiliar framework that differed from everyday school life, especially regarding the collaborative process.

Second, the structural constraints on our part, in terms of our accountability to the funders for a “successful” project outcome, also dictated that the open project be tightly directed toward the implementation of an intervention in a public space. In the project process, we broke our own intention of always meeting on an equal footing; for example, by being forced to assert the need for silence in order to continue a conversation. Yet this was tempered by acknowledging the young people's expertise and our own ignorance in other areas (for example, about their local area or first language). Thus, our roles fluctuated between managing and disciplining, encouraging and sometimes even being learners ourselves. The students, too, moved between moments of learning and mediating and moments of appropriation (in the sense of re-interpretation and transformation) and self-empowerment, which they initiated during the exploration in the workshops as well as in their experimentation with intervention and mediation during the project presentation.

When reflecting on the collaborative process further, authorship becomes an issue. What happens with the knowledge generated within a project? Who takes credit? While artists, mediators, and researchers hold similar intentions towards reaching the project objectives, sometimes the roles get blurred and differing interests as well as different results are sought by artists, mediators, and researchers. This issue became apparent from the position of the artist, who asserted that the collaborative process did not generate a result she could utilize in the field of art; but also from the position of the research team, which intrinsically holds the most powerful position in a research project and has the most to gain academically. But how do the students benefit? Would it not be fair to mention *everyone* involved as authors or creators? A strategy we employed throughout the project was to name everyone involved in each specific activity and intervention (including the students). At the end of the collaboration, we also handed out a certificate to the students asking them to officially acknowledge their participation in the project.

Third and finally, the fact that participatory projects (including ours) are most often conceived as temporary

projects became an issue of discussion. This stands in contrast with the (often unsaid, yet underlying) objective of participation to effect change in the long term, especially if a publicly funded project needs to justify a larger societal impact. Temporary initiatives and projects make it possible to grant marginalized or hidden issues visibility and to intervene in public debates. If we take the position that participation, which effects real change (in the participants or their surroundings, but also broader social change), can only take place in a long-term project, then we have to ask what is needed for a project that goes beyond temporary involvement? A strategy suggested by one of our collaborators in the project was to develop ideas on how to involve the students on a more long-term basis (see also Mörsch in print). We took this up at the end of the collaboration with the first school by inviting the students to present the project and engage with the students from the second school. Consequently, five students attended an internship with standard compensation to further analyze the process and to jointly develop a digital story for an exhibition and a publication. Regarding long-term benefits, key elements are the art-educational materials we developed, which are available to educators beyond the project timeframe and which are also being embedded in our ongoing academic work. However, it would be necessary for grant agencies to provide project funding with a focus on process and with a long-term perspective.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we would now like to return to our main argument. All three of the areas we started from – participatory art, participatory research, and critical art education – involve the transformation from passive position and social ascription as a spectator or research object to active position and ascription of agency. In this paper we have shown that if we conceptualize participation, as Nora Sternfeld has suggested (2012), as a form of partaking in which the conditions of taking part and of representation are considered and jointly negotiated and decided on, possibilities for transformation can open up. However, whether this transformation stays within the hegemonic system where power relations are preserved, or whether, in an emancipatory understanding, power relations (and institutions) are changed and transformed depends on the concrete situation (p. 122). It is clear that participation as such, in the practical and concrete work with various groups, represents a challenge that continuously generates new questions and obstacles. From our experience with this project, we concur with Sternfeld, who pleads that it is exactly this challenge of participation that represents its strength (p. 125).

We have related this to an understanding of collaboration that connects the term with an openness to change oneself and everyone involved. In such a way, knowledge is negotiable, and the process of generating knowledge comes to the forefront where as many voices as possible are heard (Terkessidis, 2015). Hence, we argue that, by employing various strategies in the development of artistic intervention, a liminal space can be opened in a playful, yet critical way. This is a collaborative process that is based on the ideas, experiences, and desires of the participants, yet it is mediated and focused by the interdisciplinary team members.

Consequently, this means that an in-between space was opened by and for the young people, but this space was moderated and also closed again by the art educators and researchers. When the students took the mobile info stand into the public space, they actively co-produced a liminal space and involved selected members of the public in their temporary intervention. In a sense, they claimed their part in society. As such, the project enabled the exploration of deconstruction strategies and the development of mediation tools through asking questions, and intervention and appropriation strategies by going public. In experimenting with these strategies and mediation tools, we collaboratively negotiated participation in a playful, yet critical way. In this process, we argue, we have intersected a critical research approach with the development of artistic intervention strategies. The interventions were aimed at initiating processes of re-interpretation, self-empowerment, and transformation of power relations. The larger project goals of transformation – such as the appropriation of decision-making power and politicization – were not achieved in this project, as they would have required a longer period of collaboration.

In the sense of participatory research, we found that the exploration of the questions of how to take part and how to live together clearly illustrate what is at stake in this project. In this respect, we understand the process of

negotiation of social roles, relationships, and meanings as an essential moment in the critical negotiation of participation. When young people experiment with and collaboratively create participatory public(s) through artistic and cultural intervention, a more democratic society can be envisioned. Thinking about the utopian concept of collaboration as a strategy, we concur with Terkessidis who states: “Even if we cannot always change the big picture, filling the gaps with collaborative approaches would be an important step towards a deeper democracy, a better coexistence, an equitable distribution of educational opportunities or a new quality of working conditions” (2015, p. 12). The asking of questions proved to be a key element: on the one hand, there is the act of asking questions in general (on different levels: scientific, within the team/as part of the process, with the students and the facilitators/teachers, in the artistic and educational materials), and, on the other hand, there is the *how* of asking open questions that (can) trigger a more engaged response. For us, a key feature here was the question: “Why is that the way it is?” We realized how important it was to *open up* processes and not to shut them down, to shift perception (deconstruction), to puzzle (intervention), and, in so doing, to raise more questions and deconstruct anew. Above all, however, we discovered the importance of collaborative learning and playful exchange, of openness to change within a project process (and the pleasure to be derived from this), in the creation of a liminal space for reflection and action. Together, we can now reflect on the question “What is to be done?”

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