

ARTS
SOCIETY
YEAH!

pARTicipation

art as a hinge ~~against populism~~
for pluralism

Documentation of an interactive symposium of a slightly different kind
3rd Dec. 2024 - Brussels



BRACHLAND-ENSEMBLE
ARTS / SOCIETY / *yeah*

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IMPRINT

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Photos by: Rolf K. Wegst
With kind permission of the [Natural History Museum Brussels](#)

„If we think of music and sport and art as the cream on the cake and not the yeast in the dough, then we misunderstand our society.“

Johannes Rau – Former Federal President of Germany



ABOUT THIS

A symposium with a difference

Since 2011, the award-winning Brachland-Ensemble has successfully developed participatory formats, productions, and concepts aimed at activating human potential for political and social engagement. These methods, which connect civil society and decision-makers, have drawn international interest, especially in light of rising populist movements across Europe. In collaboration with the Fraunhofer Institute's EU office in Brussels, we hosted an participative event for experts and multipliers from politics, science, business, education, art, and activism to joins us on a short journey through the city and time itself. This brief documentation offers insight, how to organize the search for the 'right' partners, what cooperation really means, how important it is to answer the question about one's own attitude, and which emotionalizing methods can be used to communicate complex topics in an activating way – be it in analogue or digital space. And above all: Why fun is the core element for sustainable success in the effort to create a just society, regardless of one's own social position. We have prepared a small selection of practical methods and media for you to use in your networks. We hope you may find them useful.



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„We are facing the greatest challenges in the history of humankind. And for the first time in history, we have the means and possibilities to overcome them successfully.“

Klaus Heidel / Werkstatt Ökonomie Heidelberg

If you want to know more about our repertoire and/or upcoming and (yet) not existing concepts, you could have a look at our Website, contact us and we send you more information, **BUT we recommend this:** call us and we **SHOW** you in a personal meeting, what we are doing, what we could do, and how.

A SHORT WARM-UP

WHAT THE FACT? – WHEN FACTS FAIL

Society faces complex and multifaceted challenges: climate change, social inequality, digital and urban transformation, voter apathy, emotions to derail constructive debate. In this context, facts often lose their impact. Emotional engagement in public discourse is dismissed as dubious, yet elections, for instance, are profoundly emotional events.

QUO VADIS SOCIETY? – FROM PODIUM TO KITCHEN TABLE

How can we make emotionally charged issues more relatable and communicable? How can citizens AND decision makers unlock their potential sustainably? Leaders drive change, but what drives them? We need equal partnerships that redefine shared perceptions and skills. This requires not just new alliances but an emotionally resonant, participatory approach.

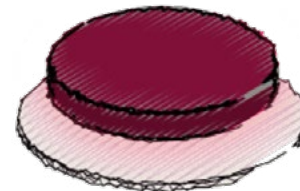
CREA(C)TIVITY – BRIDGING COMPLEXITY AND UNDERSTANDING

The underestimation of the power of emotions and ignoring our successes are the biggest mistakes a democratic society can do. In partnership with experts from various fields and the fitting methods complex topics can be translated into participatory, relatable formats. Whether on political stages, in public spaces, online, in classrooms, or at the kitchen table, our approaches foster meaningful connections and inspire action.

But where to start?
Well, Maybe at the very beginning?



Click here to open
video in browser!



„What we can do is change our thought patterns, word by word, consciously and consistently, and stick to them until we see results in the way we do things and the consequences.“

Tsitsi Dangaremba

PHASE 1: PERCEPTION

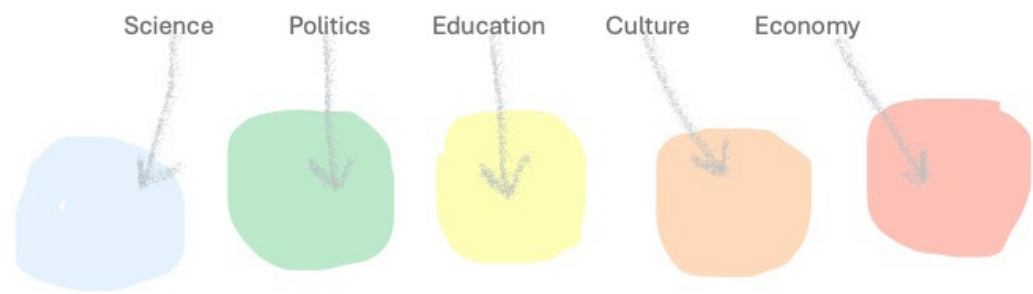
Location: Museum

Target: Team-Work

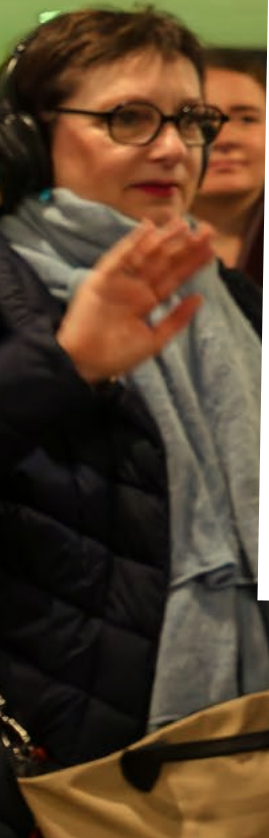
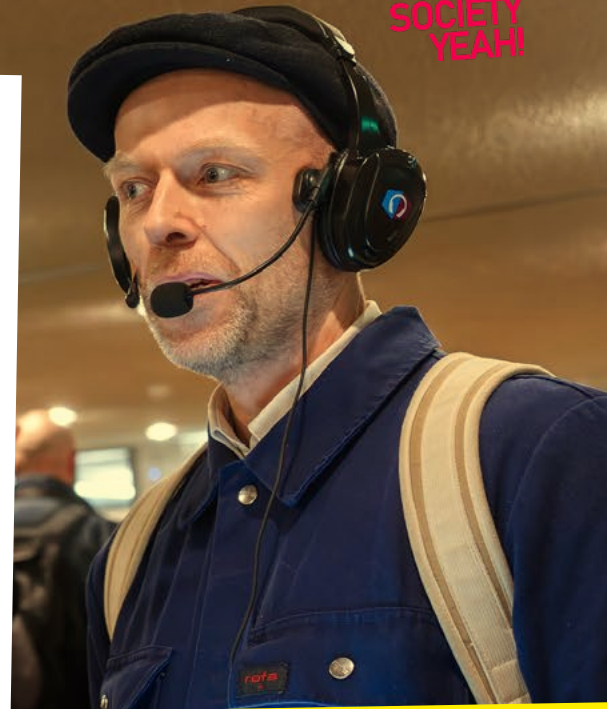


STEP ONE: WELCOME!

“And thank you for pARTicipating today at “Art as a hinge for pluralism”. We are so happy to have you here. So many people with expertise to teach us. As you know, we have tons of problems that are just waiting to be solved. We don’t want to waste much time, because you, as the professionals, the practical possibilists par excellence, know much better than us, most people focus 90% of the time on the problems and not on the solution, and as we have learned from you, it should be the other way around. We are thankful that you will help us, because you are the experts who can and will save the world. Please pick a fitting colored sticker and then form groups of four people and make sure that as many different colors as possible are represented.”



FUNFACT: A first impression forms within 100 milliseconds to 30 seconds, based on cues like body language, posture, voice, language, scent, and clothing. These impressions are often accurate, as the subconscious and amygdala process more than the conscious mind. To avoid discomfort, we stick to familiar groups, making it hard to overcome social barriers. Mixing roles and categories simplifies first contact and fosters cross-disciplinary interaction.



STEP TWO: WARMUP

„Let’s just get down to business. We have prepared a small warm-up parkours to help you get started. We have set up 3 stations in these noble halls, where small challenges are awaiting you. Between the stations you will have plenty of opportunity to ponder the solutions to the global problems. Hah, piece of cake. If you have any questions in between ... no, who are we talking to here? Of course you won’t have any question, so just follow your own most important advice: Have Fun!”

SO, WHAT DO YOU DO?

The first question when meeting someone is often answered with: ‘I’m a key account manager’ or ‘I’m a kindergarten teacher.’ Now, find an inspiring spot and pair up! What if you spent 10% of your time learning something new? Grab your stickers and write down a skill you’re good at. Teach your partner in one minute—be it a physical skill, math principle, recipe, poem, magic trick, or even yodeling. The only rule? Enjoy it! Now take one minute each to share your skill.

THE EMOJI-COMPASS

Place five sheets labeled with basic emotions—anger, joy, sadness, fear, and surprise/confusion—on a table or floor. Throw out any term, question, or statement, and position yourself by the emotion it evokes in you. This reveals how you and others feel, without disclosing agreement or disagreement, fostering empathy and maintaining privacy. Suggested prompts: School, Family, Weather, Christmas, The EU, Populism, Climate Change, Future.

WHO ARE WE THOUGH?

What if Democracy were a person? Who would it be? What traits would it have? Does it have a gender? If so, which one? How old is Democracy? Is it athletic, open, or reserved? Generous or stingy? Optimistic or pessimistic? Does it have hobbies or friends? Imagine its appearance. Choose someone in your group to draw Democracy based on everyone’s input, shared one at a time. Once finished, create a second drawing of how you wish Democracy would be as a person.





STEP THREE: PRACTICAL POSSIBILISM – FALSE SYMPOSIUM

“Welcome back. We are really very excited to learn about all the great solutions that have been collected to save the world. Let’s start with a big fish: the loss of biodiversity. What solutions do we have for that? Not all at once, please! Haha. Nobody? Well, that’s okay, it’s not an easy topic. Let’s take something simple: poverty. Well? Uhm ...that’s ... strange ... can we please check something? ..

NEWS CHECK

Please close your eyes for a moment and recall the last piece of news that you saw, read or heard. Sports news doesn’t count.

Open your eyes!

Who did remember a positive news?

LIVING STATISTICS

Divide a room into three sections: “Yes”, “No” and “No clue” for example. Or in this case: A, B, and C. Now you can ask questions. To answer, the people walk into the appropriate field.

1. In 1820, 80 out of every 100 people worldwide lived in extreme poverty. Today, it’s A: 9% B: 19% C: 32%

2. In 1820, 17 out of every 100 people had access to primary education. Today, it’s A: 86% B: 72% C: 45%

1. C, 2. A (ourworldindata.org)



OOOPS!

We messed up. You signed up for “Art as a Hinge Against Populism,” but this is “Art as a Hinge for Pluralism.” The real experts are over at the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces. So, what now? If we hit you with too many facts, you’ll feel overwhelmed, post something snarky online, and—thanks to your influence—spread negativity. Then the mood will get even worse and in the end we’ll have a self-fulfilling prophecy and everything will get worse even though it’s supposed to get better. Instead, Plan B: we’ll show you our Tutorial for dumm.. uhm highly sophisticated tutorial on practical possibilism. Let’s dive in!

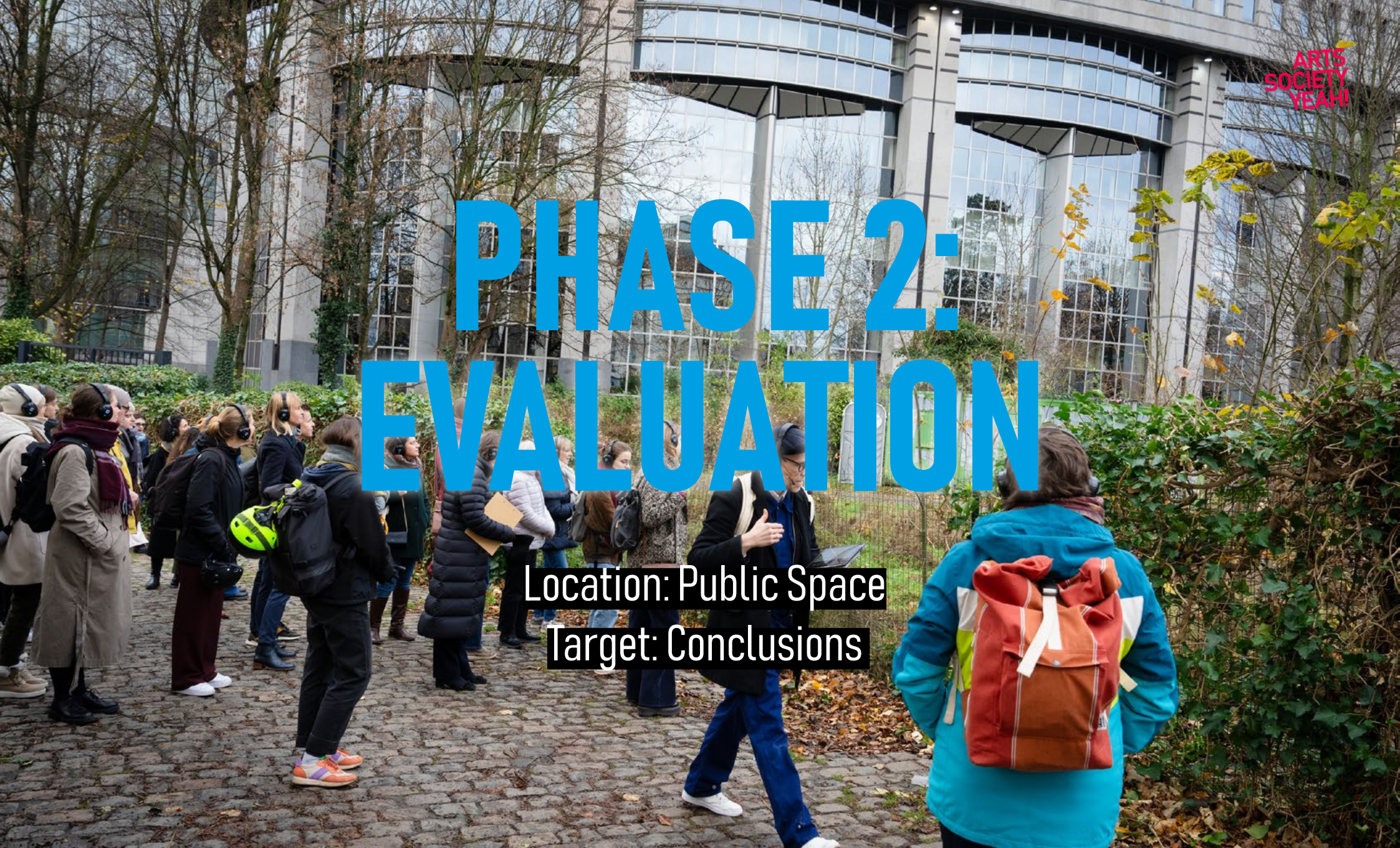
Click here to open
video in browser!



“So, after this little introduction and the ... somewhat painful realization that your world view is not quite what we expected, there is only one thing left for us to do, namely to look at the real world. Grab your coats.”

PHASE 2: EVALUATION

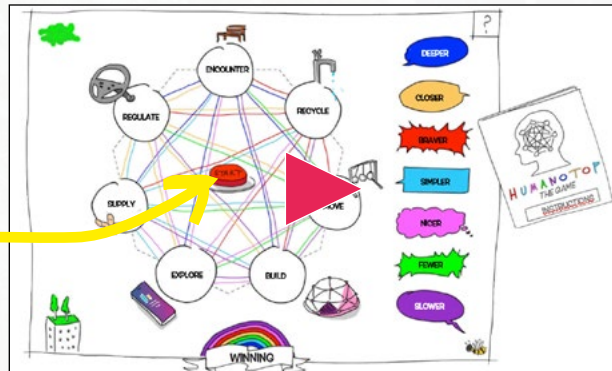
Location: Public Space
Target: Conclusions



A QUESTION OF ATTITUDE

Thank you. Calibration of the holograms completed. You may now begin the briefing. "Time to come clean: You're in the future, in a simulated replica of early 21st-century Brussels. You're holograms, programmed to think you're attending an interactive symposium. Societies of the 21st century overcame challenges and shaped our present, but how? That data was lost. Here's the key: early 21st-century society asked, What's in it for me? People resisted sacrifice. We theorize societal attitudes shifted toward a sustainable pleasure society, replacing energy-intensive traditions with engaging, sustainable innovations. Millions contributed small-scale innovations that drove large-scale change, supported by accessible education. Cities became labs for change, with accessible education fueling progress. Your actions may reveal answers, so act naturally—your choices already shaped a great future, so: Enjoy it! We must hurry, 125 million volunteers pedal to power this research right now."

Click here to open video in browser!



„Encounter. Society, individualisation, communication, identity, The Carrier. Scope. Does it carry? Can you bear it? Let's get along. Selected posture field: Closer.

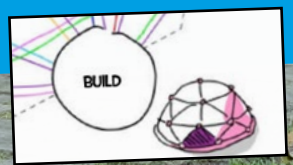
What do you have to bear? Do you think others carry similarly heavy loads? Do the people around you seem burdened? What would you like to say to a stranger in your city? Now choose one of the neighbouring shops with your group, no matter which one. Go inside and ask the person you meet the following question: What skills do you need to make the world a better place? You have three minutes."



"Let's stop for a moment, Look around. What is the first thing you notice? Do you like what you see? Why don't you point to it? Do you see something that you think is wrong? Point to it. And do you now discover something you feel is right?"

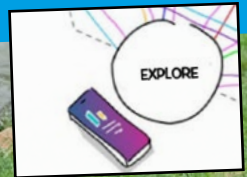
„Build. Infrastructure. Construction, the builders, edifying, obstructed, I dismantle. Selected posture field: **Less**

An empty surface, an empty space, is a treasure trove of possible absences. All these ‚absences‘ have compressed contents that can bring about an ‚enchantment of the viewer. Is there a gap in your city you would like to fill? And where in your city would you like to create a gap? Use the chalk and write down spontaneously what you think you will see here in 10 years‘ time. This could be something small, such as changed rubbish bins, lamps, or even other shops or buildings. And off you go.“



„Explore. Education. Science. Culture. The researchers, research, that is research, progress. Chosen field of attitude: **Courageous.**

Take a piece of chalk in your hand. What was the most important question in your life as a child? And what is it today? Now write the two questions on the floor if you like. What was the most important question in your life when you were a child? And what is it today? Take a look at all the questions.“



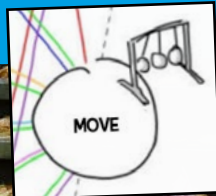


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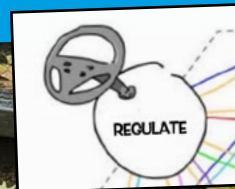
„**Moving.** Mobility, route relationships, transport, accessibility. The movers, get moved, something is moving, nothing is moving, wayfaring-being fucked up. Chosen posture field: **Lower.**“

What or who would you like to move? How much mobility is expected of you? What would you like to achieve? And when will it be enough for you? Do you have enough room to move? What actually moves you? Your organization/institution? Do you move it? And how does your organization/institution actually move? With a swift step? Is it athletic or sluggish? Burdened? Purposeful? Limited? Try it out? Imagine, you would be your organization/institution. Walk like it. How does it feel? And now: How should it walk? Try it. And at last: How should it dance? Your stage.“



„**Regulate:** Selected posture field: **Easier.**“

What is your iron rule? Which rule would you like to break? What mistake would you like to make? What would you do differently if you knew that nobody was judging you? If you could change 1 thing in your city, what would it be? And with what goal? And who is taking the first step? Let's elect a leader. Stand in a circle and look at each other. On the count of three, everyone points to the person who makes the most competent impression. Pointing to yourself is allowed. The person with the most votes wins. 1.2.3.“



„**Recycle.** Outflows, waste, sanitation, cycles, recycling, mortality. The recyclers, value creation, valuable, worthless, of value, value, increase and decrease in value Chosen posture field: **Nicer.**“

What would you like to leave behind?“



„What is a bad subsidy? A bad subsidy is when a business model costs civil society more than it earns and earns the business operator more than it costs him, because civil society does not realize what it actually costs them, but only realizes what it costs them when the managing director has handed over responsibility and/or his life. And so welcome to our big auction „There we have the salad!“

Exhibit 1: A perfectly preserved, hand-harvested, organic lettuce from a solidarity farm near Brussels, offering 75 kilocalories. Now up for auction! The question: How many kilocalories of human energy were needed to produce it? Discuss for 30 seconds and place your bids. Closest guess wins.

Exhibit 2: An industrially grown winter lettuce from December 2022, produced in a greenhouse using pesticides and fossil fuels. Its energy content? Also 75 kilocalories. Question: How many kilocalories, including fossil fuel use, greenhouse upkeep, and machinery, were needed for this out-of-season lettuce? External costs like soil erosion or climate impact are excluded. You have 30 seconds—place your bids!

Exhibit 1: 56,25 Kcl Exhibit 2: 37500kcl

We are dealing with an extreme example here, but in the Western industrial supply system, an average of 19200 calories of resources are invested for 2000 kilocalories of food intake per person per day. Bon appetite. [MORE INFO](#)

„Supply. Nutrition. Energy. Raw materials. Care. Health. Labour. Time. The carers. Care. Provision, Take care, Don't worry. I'll take care. Chosen posture field: Slower“





Lyca
Mobile

ALIMENTATION
GENERALE



du lundi au vendredi
van maandag tot vrijdag
de van 7.30 h tot 9.00 h
et / ou
de van 15.00 h tot 20.00 h

*"Thanks, we have now enough data.
One last question: If the whole world was listening to you, what would be your message?"*

'It's not just about what we use to power container ships, but also about powering fewer container ships.'

Morgane de Toeuf, bioingénieur



PHASE 3: ACT

Location: Community center

Target: Cooperation

“Welcome to our great show „Do it!“!

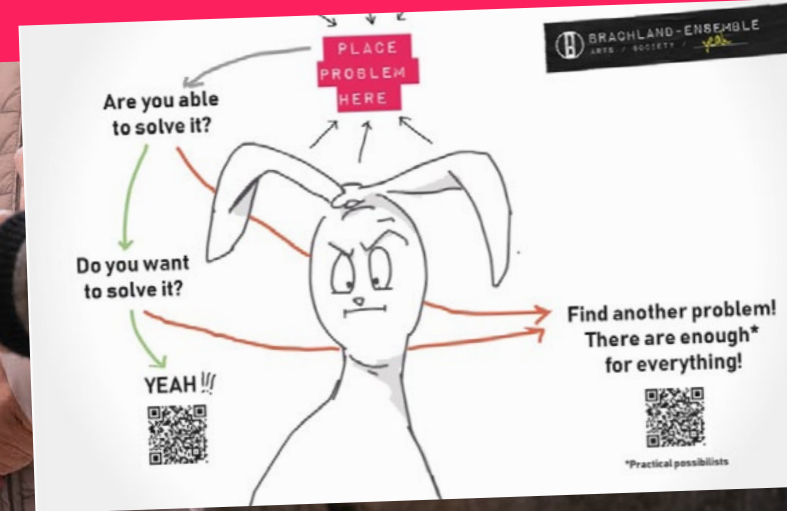
Pull up a chair, make yourself comfortable, but don't lay back, because we've got a lot planned in about 10 minutes, billions of people will tune in live to be inspired by us on how to make the world a better place. Yeah, that's right. Today's live broadcast should serve as inspiration for the 8 billion people out there who are improving the world in small and large ways and who feel one thing above all. Alone. So we have to motivate them, activate them. We only have ten minutes, so let's briefly summarize what we know and then get into action.”

1. **POPULISM** steals time
2. populism isolates
3. populism serves (negative) emotions like a rollercoaster and always needs a new kick.
4. populism is entertaining (in a morbid way like a traffic accident)
5. populism hijacks narratives and remains like poop on a shoe.

1. **PLURALISM** needs time
 2. pluralism integrates
 3. pluralism considers emotions to be something dubious and focuses primarily on facts, whereas elections, for example, are a predominantly emotional affair.
 4. pluralism is (currently) not very entertaining.
 5. pluralism is far too busy and/or modest to celebrate its own successes in an inviting way. Which in turn leads to point 4.
- We are far too little aware of our potential and the hurdles we have already overcome.

Practical Possibilism:

Most people spend most of their time analysing problems and far too little time solving them. That's no fun. Practical Possibilists do exactly the opposite and ask themselves two questions. 1. Can I solve this problem? 2. Do I want to solve this problem? If the answer to either question is no, then they look for another area in which they can apply their skills. After all, there are enough people for all problems.





*“So let’s simply dedicate ourselves instead to Us against them to We for all.
Keyword: cooperation! cooperation means pursuing common goals based on a
division of labor. Let’s act.”*

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Form groups of three to four people. All of you have already written down a skill on your colored sticker. Each group has 5 minutes to find a problem that can be solved with the combination of these skills, whether back pain or world peace is up to you. Many an absurd idea has matured into a finished project using this variant of the headstand method. Make sure that your skills really work together, i.e. that they don’t just fulfill their usual task independently of each other. Invent something new. It doesn’t have to be perfect. 5 minutes, starting now.

The time is up, we will go live in 3,2,1...



Dear readers, if you are expecting a grand finale, the missing piece of the puzzle for the big realization, the big aha moment, then we have to disappoint you.

Because this is just the beginning. It would be great to have the ears of the whole world listening for just a few minutes. It would be easy, if there was this one final invention, this single revolution, the one final concept. But this would belittle all the achievements of those who, day in, day out, give their best in small and large ways, despite all the obstacles, whether they are excavating dinosaur bones, calculating the energy balance of salad cultivation, or simply being a listening ear at the centre of their community. And who, despite everything we believe we perceive, still represent the majority with their desire for an open society.

*As a representative example of all these people, we picked one during this symposium and connected live to the **MUSEUM OF ENVIRONMENT OF THE RWANDA CULTURAL HERITAGE ACADEMY (INTEKO Y'UMUCO) IN RWANDA**. People in countries like Rwanda are already feeling the full force of the consequences of man-made climate change. And while we here in Western countries are still debating whether to act, people in these countries are already creating facts by turning to solutions. We warmly invite you to take a moment to view the work of the RCHA at this [LINK](#). And in the knowledge that beneath the crust of daily horror reports, there is an ocean of success stories, all of which deserve to be brought to the surface. The challenges are enormous, but have a look at this documentation and explore, what is possible in two hours. What could we create together in two weeks, months, 20 years, if we realize, that our efforts have success?*

*Everything will be fine. When? This is up to us. Thank you.**

It is easy to be cynical about the world and claim that nothing is getting better. Fortunately, empirical research says the opposite. The world is much more malleable than you think: and it is just waiting for you to hammer it into the right shape. –

Max Roser – Oxford

PHASE 4: FRIES & FRIENDS

Location: Community center / Bar

Target: Relax and discuss



ABOUT US (AND OUR PARTNERS)

The multi-award-winning Brachland Ensemble, with bases in Cologne, Nuremberg, Hamburg, and Brussels, has long been a leading force in participatory methodology and cross-sector project development. It has become a key partner for municipalities, ministries, and institutions promoting public engagement, transparency in socio-political processes, and innovative forms of communication in both physical and digital formats. Addressing complex, socially relevant topics—ranging from the CIA’s interrogation program to civic engagement’s impact on EU politics, as well as scientific themes like empathy, the brain, biodiversity, climate change, AI, and urban futures—the ensemble develops diverse presentation formats while fostering a broad network of experts across disciplines such as science, politics, media, education, psychology, and sociology. Collaborators include Amnesty International, UNESCO Germany, international municipalities, universities, civil society organizations, ministries, and state representatives. Productions often build on one another, with insights feeding into new concepts. In 2021, the ensemble collaborated with the German Federal Ministry of Economics on a digital event exploring future urban living spaces. Moving forward, the Brachland Ensemble aims to establish an international think tank in Brussels to advance participatory methods, launch new projects, and solidify its global impact.

