

Community Engagement with Inclusive Design: A Conceptualisation Framework

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Abstract. As part of the EU-funded VOICE project, a conceptualisation framework is being developed to guide and support artist-led community engagement in tackling Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 11, 12, 13 and 17. Inclusive design plays an important role in developing the framework and associated resources. This paper summarises key artist-led initiatives in Europe, and identifies two unique features of the VOICE project in comparison to existing initiatives. Through engaging the project consortium partners, the authors illustrate an initial framework, and outline the plan for further, iterative development, aiming to make it useful for all potential users including the VOICE consortium, artists in communities, community organisations and local government, and the EU public.

Keywords: Community-engagement, Inclusive Design, Artist-led Practice.

1 VOICE Project

Valorising Artist-led Innovation through Citizen Engagement (VOICE) is a European Commission (EC)/Innovate UK-funded consortium project. It aims to address the complex social and cultural constructs that play a vital role in knowledge valorisation and supporting systemic change in societal response to environmental and ecological sustainability.

1.1 Artist-led Initiatives

Artists and arts can act as a catalyst for collaboration between citizens, industry, and other stakeholders, by integrating diverse creative expressions and grassroot-led innovation in ‘real world’ contexts to enhance co-creation with citizens and industry. In Europe, artist-led interdisciplinary initiatives have been practised for years, and Table 1 gives some examples.

Artist-led or artistic-led initiatives also exist in other countries and regions, for example, in Canada, the Banff New Media Institute (BNMI) believes that art and cultural industries, in collaboration with scientists, social scientists, and humanists have a critical role to play in developing technologies and content that work for human betterment [1], such as sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11). Its ‘Artists as Innovators’ project engaged cultural and new media producers, artists and researchers to address the inclusive design challenges of online cultural content and new media. It has challenged visual artists, musicians, writers, producers and the cultural audience to consider how accessibility can be a natural part of the artistic expression and experience [1]. Another example is Friend of The Artist (FOA) [2] that is dedicated to elevating the work of emerging artists from around the world.

2 A Conceptualisation Framework

Two unique features of the VOICE project, in comparison to existing artist-led initiatives, are its inclusive community engagement and focus on valorisation of artist-led tools, methods, processes, and approaches. The conceptualisation framework will form the underlying theoretical context for the VOICE project, to lead to understandings and dissemination of the lens in which it operates both internally and externally.

This framework is understood as an overarching and generative model that grows from its participants – again, both internal and external. The framework will be captured as part of the ongoing intentions of the VOICE project and will be applicable for future users in similar types of projects, who might want to engage artists in inclusive practice that is applied to creative problem-solving in communities.

Table 1. Examples of artist-led initiatives in Europe.

Examples	Summary	Source/Website
S+T+ARTS	The EC's Science, Technology and Arts (S+T+ARTS) initiative, with many projects utilising digital technologies for innovation.	https://starts.eu/
SMARTlab Academy	An academic collective which promotes user-driven, transdisciplinary research, leveraging Creative Technology Innovations for social change.	https://www.smartlab.academy/
WAAG Future Lab	WAAG contributes to the research, design and development of a sustainable, just society through interdisciplinary approaches.	https://waag.org/en/
Ars electronica	A space of exchange and collaboration for a network of cultural institutions, artists, scientists, technologists, and policymakers to re-imagine tech-driven change through art.	https://ars.electronica.art/europe/en/
Better Factory	It provides a methodology for manufacturing SMEs to collaborate with artists to develop new and personalised products.	https://betterfactory.eu/
In4Art	It provides art-driven innovation methods for combining artistic experimentation, rigorous research and practical perspectives to create lasting value.	https://www.in4art.eu/about/#us

2.1 The Consortium Partners' Perspective

In order to begin the development of a conceptualisation, or 'living' framework, primary stakeholders' considerations were addressed and captured through open and discursive methods. First, the views of the VOICE consortium partners - most of whom are experts in artist-led practices - were collected. These discussions were captured through group meetings and individual meetings, depending on the partners' availability.

Inclusive community engagement was defined as a practical process of how to engage communities (with diverse participants) and co-create from an artistic perspective. It was felt that the framework is not only about the methods employed during artist-led projects, but also about the interrelationships of these forms of engagement. The importance of plural stakeholder perspectives was raised, and looking at things such as the need from the communities: considerations around what is it that communities need from artists in order to support and develop these types of interventions. Partners felt that the framework should be considered from both the artists and the community perspectives, and that it should focus on the key VOICE project goals which are environmental, social and technological ways in which best practices tackle those concerns. The framework should not only keep open-ended for the community to interpret what those needs

are, but also keep enough specificity that it has a relationship with the UN's Sustainability Development Goals (SDG) 11-13 and 17. Inclusive design, in this context, abides that the outliers (e.g., most extreme users) have more insights and knowledge to bring than the middle (e.g., the 'average' users or the mainstream users). Inclusive design of community engagement requires consideration of a range of issues, from colour calibration and font choice of project website to the dynamics of engagement. Community engagement with inclusive design means that the engagement activity (e.g., a workshop) has been built in a way that is the most inclusive and accessible for whoever walks in, and whatever they bring into the room.

Valorisation was discussed and clarified. It is not purely human-centred, but aims towards becoming or supporting eco-centred principles. It demonstrates how artist-society-technology schemes could facilitate the environment and our living conditions.

Principles of developing the conceptualisation framework were proposed, including: adaptive, agile, iterative, guided by practice, and generative.

Figure 1 summarises the key stakeholders of the VOICE project, the different layers (e.g., policy, industry) and the diffusion of thinking (suggested by the arrows).

2.2 The Artists' Perspective

As shown in Figure 1, artists play a critical role in VOICE through community engagement. In the VOICE project, six artists have been selected to participate in the pilot, and they will receive training (e.g., on a range of tools for identifying stakeholders, specifying impacts, and inclusive design) and mentorship (e.g., on community engagement). Their needs for, and perspectives of, the conceptualisation framework will be captured through interviews.

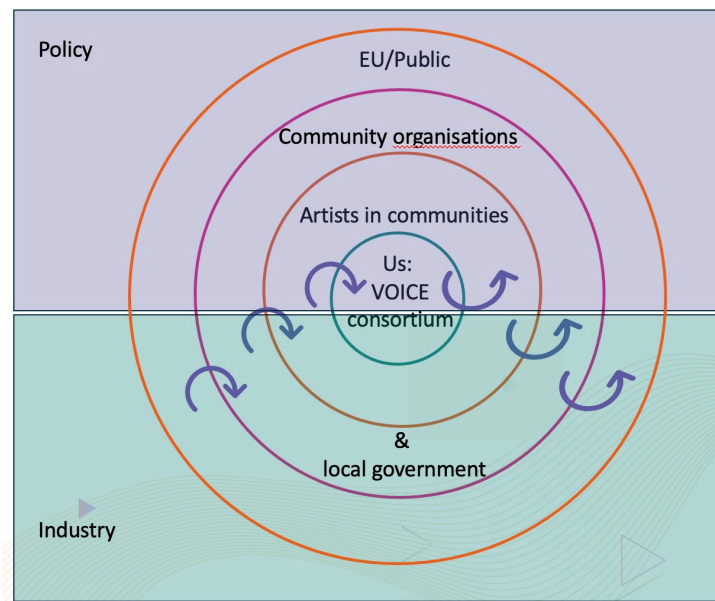


Fig. 1. An initial, schematic representation of the key stakeholders of VOICE.

2.3 The Broader Public's Perspective

The public's perspective on the conceptualisation framework will be captured through engaging communities of practice in Europe, for example, organising (online or offline) workshops with community groups.

3 Conclusions and Future Work

This paper outlines the process towards developing a conceptualisation framework for artist-led community engagement through inclusive design. It has identified key principles with the VOICE consortium partners,

i.e., follow an iterative development process and guided by practice, be adaptive, agile, and generative. Further work includes engaging stakeholders (Fig 1) in developing its interactive and generative functions.

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