

Co-Creating Public Space: How Can We Thrive?

Panel 2: We are all economists Transcript

0:10 Vikkie Cheng

So, our second panel is *We are all economists*, which will be moderated by Fatoş Üstek. Fatoş is an independent curator and writer based - based in London. She is Curator of *Frieze Sculpture 2023* in London, also author of *The Art Institution of Tomorrow, Reinventing the Model*, which will be published in January 2024. I'll hand over to Fatoş who will introduce the panellists, Torange Khonsari and Raluca Voinea.

0:50

[Clapping]

0:55 Fatoş Üstek

Hi, everyone, we can start slowly, because there's still a queue for teas. So, the main strong content will only start bit later. But thank you so much. So, thank you for being here. And thank you UP Projects and John Hansard Gallery for the invitation. And thank you, Emma, Elisabeth and Jack for the great organisation. And also, thanks to our BSL interpreters, for their hard work. Really appreciated. I have to, okay, so I have to start with introducing myself. I mean, I've already introducing myself a bit later, but I'm 43-year-old woman with black curly hair, I would think of myself as tall, because I'm average in the country that I'm from - Turkey, but I'm bit short in the UK average. So and I'm wearing black, mostly all black with some red earrings. So welcome all, it's really a pleasure to see many familiar faces, and I haven't had a chance to say hi, and also new faces in attendance. So we have almost an hour and a half. I'm sure you will get really starving by the end of our conversation. So we will try to be as engaging as possible. And our panel titled *We are economists* is quite a poignant one. As you've already seen in the previous panel, there was a lot of conversation about the economy and especially time, labour, money, fees, remuneration. And that, you know this idea of that we are all economists not only foils the fact that we live in a market dominated society, but also pronounces our agency that is important in shaping the relationship to resources, goods, speculative markets and consumption. Before we dive into looking at alternative economic models that might produce a different world of realms, then rather than the one that we're experiencing, I want to address the umbrella question, how can we thrive? So, I would like to quote from Kate Raworth, she is - she calls herself as a renegade economist. And her seminal book, many of you might have already read, *Doughnut Economics*, that she gives examples of cultural conceptions of thriving together. So quote, "in some cultures, the idea of driving and balance goes back much further. For ancient Greeks, it is all things in

good measure is the best. In Māori culture, the concept of wellbeing combines spiritual, ecological, kinship, and economic wellbeing into woven as interdependent dimensions. In Andean cultures, literally living well is a worldview that values the fullness of life, in a community with others and with nature. Roberts definition of what enables human beings to thrive is “a world in which every person can lead their life with dignity, opportunity, and community and where we can all do so within the means of our life giving planet””. So today, we will be exploring systemic thinking, and practice-based methodologies from two esteemed speakers. Why we will attempt in responding to the umbrella question of today's symposium. We will also expand on the concepts such as commons, land, governance, agency, and relational aesthetics of care. Please let me start by introducing myself. So, I'm Fatoş Üstek as Vikkie kindly introduced. I'm an independent curator and writer based in London, and I work internationally and my most large body of work is now being published. And it's going to be out in the beginning of next year. So for the last two years I've been actually looking at and working on building a new model for art institutions. So my book is titled *The Art Institution of Tomorrow, Reinventing the Model*. And I hope it's going to kind of like trigger some conversations about the most needed radical systemic change that we're all talking about. So what I wanted to say is that, you know, in my book, what I'm also kind of looking at - it is a study of organisational systems and systemic thinking that aims to provide solutions to the codependent situation of art institutions and equip them with agency and, if possible, support them in gaining autonomy that they historically never had. I'm proposing ideas of distribution, decentralisation as well as self-management and horizontal organisational models, which we will be talking about today in depth. And I'm truly delighted to be joined by two outstanding colleagues who bring a breadth of experience and wealth of insights to some of these pressing issues that we are facing in the sector. Raluca Voinea is a Curator and Art Critic based in Bucharest for over a decade she has been Co-Leader of in transit.ro. And, and it's an association that transit.ro Association, and been managing the space in Bucharest, which included an art gallery, a communitarian permaculture garden, and an orangery that was a space for hosting fragile plans and ideas until 2019. And since 2008, she is Co-Editor of DEA arts + society magazine and coordinator of the Expozitii collection of IDEA publishing house. She's authored books on performance and translated *Radical Museology of Claire Bishop* into Romanian. Raluca was also the Curator of the Romanian Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale. She currently co-leads The Experimental Station for Research on Art and Life, and she will be introducing us that this new research centre, the station, which is a new iteration, in a way of transit space, and the rural Bucharest. Torange Khonsari, on my right, is an esteemed writer, academic and practitioner. She is co-founder and director of public works, which is an organism, public art and architecture practice since 2004. public works is an interdisciplinary practice working on co-production methods in art, architecture, urbanism, systems thinking and citizenship. She works with local organisations, communities, government bodies and stakeholders. Torange participated in the British Pavilion at the 2021 Venice Biennale - Venice Architecture

Biennale. And she recently delivered a TEDx talk on harnessing the power of civic commons, and currently works as the course leader for all design and cultural commons courses at the Metropolitan - London Metropolitan University. She revises the dates and old-fashioned conception of the commons and engages them with distributed and decentralised economies. She will be sharing examples of this work in the context of socially engaged public art in her production - in her presentation. So, our outline is as follows. Our two speakers will give a presentation for about 15 minutes each. And that will be followed, followed by a panel discussion for another half an hour. And we will then open the floor for questions. So please note down your questions in any case, if we can't open them, if we can't answer them in this panel, we will have a possibility and afterwards in the afternoon. So dear Torange, many thanks for being with us today. And perhaps could we start with your presentation?

9:37 Torange Khonsari

Yes. Hi, everyone. So many familiar faces and so lovely to see you all, actually. And we've been on a lot of these journeys together, I think throughout the throughout the last 20 odd years that we've been practising socially engaged arts and I want to also, you know, I trained as an architect, so I want to thank the art world, really, for giving us the space to be able to do some of this experimentation, which I hope now we can give something back in a way. So I suppose the, you know, people would ask me before I did my PhD, so what do you do, and I always was like, "well, you know, I trained as an architect, and then I am doing public art, and then I'm engaging with heritage and", and so it was kind of almost like a three sentence long thing about what it is that I was doing. And I use my PhD as a way to think about a discourse in a way that didn't really require these kinds of disciplines, in a, in a hermetic way in their enclosures, to - to kind of determine what I was or what I did. So, one of the really inspiring books, which probably a lot of you know about was Kate Raworth's *Doughnut Economics*. And she has in her book page where she's just less 21st century priorities, which are her priorities. And when I, when I made this graphic, really interestingly, in the middle of it, there was this kind of almost like an institutional fulcrum that was this, the market of the commons, the sphere of community, which is probably where we're all working in, and, and the state. And I found that distinction kind of really interesting. And there is also an article by James Gilligan, where he says, "we need to start to separate what is a public good, and what is a common good", because this blurring of these two concepts, means that that we're not actually situating our work with it with a very specific logic. And then, and then understanding what is economy might be. This is probably what we have now, in the one before power was right at the bottom here, it's right at the top, with the commons at the bottom, and the household is not even considered in our economy. So what happens and - and I don't mean that we separate these things, and they're working in isolation, but it's more that let's for a moment, separate them to then decide how they come together. So actually, the, you know, the sphere of the private, not private life. But private markets, has a very specific logic, it's

about privatisation and enclosures. It's about profit making. It's about self-interest. And, and it is creating a private society in neoliberal kind of context. The public is the state. It's the sphere of politics and policy. It's the sphere of power. And it is also where there are no boundaries, it is open, the boundaries are not enclosed, they're open completely to a crowd of many, right, so the public is as many people as there are in a nation. So, then you start to become very abstract in terms of who is the public, really, and so solutions or discussions become very broad, or we become average people within the commons, which is about collective ownership, self-governance, and collaborative working together. And this is where it's a very different logic again, so where you have self-governance, you actually have the power and the agency to actually work within - within that kind of environment. So - so the commons do have a boundary, but the boundary should not be enclosures, and it isn't completely open. And the biggest design is at the moment, the design of what that boundary, how would that look like how do you make it permeable, and inclusive, and so on and so forth. And I'll give you an example. This was a community garden we initiated back in 2006. And had Somewhere, the artists Nina Pope and Karen Guthrie, were commissioned to kind of do the design of it. But what happened was that the local authority said, "okay, fine, we give you the land, but it has to be a public park well designated as a park so the gate has to be open. And then you have all the beds and all the structures that go over the park" and that's the that was the friends that of Abbey Gardens as a - as a community group. So as a community, we had terms of engagement, we had our meetings, we grew together, we ate together, all of these things. But then the doors were open, so people got confused - they thought it's a public good. So they would come and just take stuff and go. And so it started to create this conflict. And that's where I started to see this happening over and over again, where these two logics are actually quite different. They mean quite different things. So once kind of - and it's like, honestly, I don't want the people in the market to be in the commerce necessarily. So this hedging - this hegemonic thinking that we have to think about one particular system, overtaking another system, I think, is probably quite problematic, because you're going to have different people with very different desires, kind of corrupting certain systems, because that's what they want. So actually, what happens if the sphere of the commons has an economy? Obviously, the state should have it, and the private anyway has it. So, then we start to think about a commons public partnership, rather than a private public partnership. So, what / how would that look like? And, and in a way, I just want to show very briefly this kind of project, which I'm sorry, some of you have probably seen this to death. But - but it's, it's now we've - we've now got it as a permanent building. So, it was this site that we had the community in, well, residents group in Bow come to us and say, "we want to take control of what happens to the High Street, could you help us with your students?" And we built a classroom and offered free architectural education in this kind of classroom. And, and then as we did this, we started to have people say, "well, could we come and run a yoga class and can we come and run this and that, and artists came, and could we put a show on and so on?" And we said, "yeah, of course". So, it

became this kind of what we started to frame as a public living room. But the locals called it the common room. And, and then, as Architects, were creating this feasibility studies, nobody had kind of you come in as an expert, and you do this feasibility study, but that but so we thought, actually, why don't we subvert that, create a feasibility study or a report, but actually, it's the - it's what the people have been doing and what they want from their local area. And this document became, so both of these, I would frame them as common goods, because they actually have agency to claim counter power for the community. So, this becomes a space for them, and now it's a permanent building, we've just finished building it. And the Roman Road Trust, which is a local community organisation have a 25-year lease on this piece of for the building to run more and more kinds of projects. And this document was used in order to obtain that land, to show a different value, to show social value, as opposed to financial value. And then - and then, you know, different art projects that kind of just really started to talk about land, and, and the kind of exploit, not just exploitation of land, but the fact that we were losing public lands. So, this became a methodology for us to protect through the commons, public lands from privatisation. And then a Neighbourhood Plan, which is a legal way within which communities can develop their own local plan, which when the developers come, they need to, also when this gets ratified, I don't have time to describe it so much. But this is an urban commons, where the policies and everything has been done by the community, and, and through actually a lot of art projects as well participatory art projects. And so, so there is an agency here that the community have agency in terms of what happens development wise. And this, so, this is another project, which I'll go through - whiz through really quickly. So this was a laundry room in Southwark that the residents really wanted us as part of the art commission, that we had for them to claim it, and we thought great, you know, we know how to put a planning application and we'll claim this as a community space has been empty for, for ages. We put the planning in the curator and somebody in the housing got into an argument, or at least they said something and the officer didn't like it. And basically, he tried, he blocked it. This wasn't going to happen now. And then we started to think, okay, well, maybe we can't do it, but like, we had to pull the planning. And we thought, okay, well, let's look at a social contract then, between the community and, and the council, because if there is an agreement, and a social contract between them, then maybe some of these things, you know, needs to be clarified, clearly stated in a legal way. This is the boring document that even I couldn't get my head round on that side. And then we thought, okay, let's use a public art event to write kind of how the social contract of a community charter could be. So, we had kind of all this illustrated, we did a colouring book for the local schools, in terms of how you set up a community charter. And we I mean, there's just few of the pages of it. And then we gave it to the local councillors, as well. And then we within it, we took every bit of it out. Within it, there's kind of a you have to collect local people's complaints. So, so an artist did a complaints choir, as part of that, then there was, you have to come together in an assembly to discuss; so we did a massive dinner were a street party and a massive dinner, I'm nearly there. And

that was local women, again, paid to do this. We kind of created - you see the milk flow to the back, we created that room, they didn't allow for us to claim just as a kind of, and it's sat in front of that room, as the kind of community space where this charter was being explained and the colouring and we had, then there's a process of listening within the charter where it says, you know, you have to listen to the community. So, we had another artist, Claudia doing a listening booth. The face painting became the different elements of the charter. So as people were getting face painting, they were, they were told about the different kinds of elements within it. And then we had a tea dance, which, which is what the older people kind of really wanted. But again, it was a tea dance that was curated on a social contract. Don't ask me. *[Laughter]* And, and then there was the, yeah, nobody had time. So, we started to talk about time-based Christmas presents because it was at Christmas. So, I don't know if I have time for all that. But oh, maybe I just do this. But this is the final bit. And so, with our practice, we started to also think about the commons, how do you as an organisation become a commons? And so, we are 12 directors, we are we don't have any employees, and everybody has their own interests, they have their own way of raising funds for their own specific interest. There, so there's 12 different networks, so - so you kind of grew up this way, if you want to grow. And the idea was that how do you just kind of create almost like a social movement through your organisation, and 20% of what we all earn goes into a collective pot, but all the decisions gets made collectively. And we are based in a community with R-Urban, which is a project that our offices are in. And so, we're also really locally embedded as well as going out to other kinds of projects. And that's the last one just to kind of say all of this is really quite messy. This is kind of a situated image as a model we created because we always had developers come in and say, "oh, well, there is no community here, or there is no wealth here - social wealth here". And so, this is actually much longer, it's about four metres long, where we actually did this tableau vivaan, almost of all the different kinds of community groups, their values, and so on to just say there is a different value. And this was done for the band I left so thank you so much.

23:34

[Clapping]

24:43 Fatoş Üstek

Thank you Torange for this. It's really inspiring. Actually, before we go to Raluca, I want to ask a burning question, which is about the community charter. Can you perhaps like tell us a little bit about, let's say, in practice, what did it mean? And when you talk about, let's say, listening and then kind of taking in how much of what was the balance of leading, you know, the making of a community charter, and?
[Laughter]

25:12 **Torange Khonsari**

So, the thing is that this was so last minute that they pulled the planning, so we had to really quickly rethink the whole project. So, both the Neighbourhood Plan and the community charter is part of the Conservative Party's neoliberal agenda called The Localism Act. Now, neither the public sector wants anybody to use it, because they think they're giving up power, nor anybody on the left, because they think it's a neoliberal policy. I think it's an absolute opportunity to shift to counter power, actually, it's just about how you do it. And so, within that, and this is really interesting, because within it, there is community charters, there's neighbourhood planning, there is right to buy assets, there's right to manage assets, you know, so if you're talking about land, there's lots of legal opportunities, but nobody knows how to also practice it. And so, where I think art, you know, become so important, and actually is that it becomes - makes these things accessible, you know, and, and so, in a way we did that, again, we we've been using the colouring book in, in other contexts. So, at that point, we would have had to, it's again, the same thing, you run out of time, so we did it, but then we didn't have the time to really, we would needed another year, to kind of say, "okay, now we're going to have to set this in place properly". Whereas we handed it over to the community groups and community organisations there, and said, it's really important for you to do it and contact us if you need support. So I don't know, in that situation, whether and that comes to the weakness of time that we talked about earlier, within art commissions. Whereas the one I showed you earlier, I was there for eight years, basically, until this building got built. And now I've handed it over to them. So, so yeah, but yeah.

27:34 **Fatoş Üstek**

Thank you. No, that's great. Thank you. So perhaps, Raluca, we could have, we could hear your presentation?

27:47 **Raluca Voinea**

As you realise I'm here not as a, as someone working with communities or as an economist. I'm sort of an embodiment, let's say of a future digital voice. And I would not describe myself, therefore, just like you, were the image that you projected of Sharon while they were speaking. Yeah, so I will just try to put into more concrete terms, what she was talking about, they were talking about, which is that is a very personal experience of about a decade, I come from Bucharest, in Romania, marginally Eastern European place. And I've been part of this organisation called transit.ro which is in itself, a small part of a bigger network. And since the beginning, we, as there were several of us involved, and none of us were actually leading the organisation. And now I tend to think that actually there is a problem with this term of leadership, as it means we have to take something somewhere. And my - from my experience, what we do is to try to keep something into place at any cost, which sometimes is a great cost. And yeah, so transit is a is a

contemporary art institution. And it's aimed in the beginning to be an art gallery and it soon evolved at least the part in Bucharest that I was working with and for and together to the bone with so it soon became obvious that art - art is changing all the time and what is happening around us is much more important than the ideas that we might have in mind. So, it was a place that was very much responsive to the local context. And it had a garden, which is a great privilege for any organisation or institution. So then slowly lessons, we started to learn from the garden and, and then gradually, the community that was coming together around the garden became more important than the actual programme of the gallery. And the gallery itself dissolved with the programme and with the space into the needs of the garden, let's say. And we left the space at - at the end of 2019, in a way prophetically, because that was two months before the lockdown. And we took personal and institutional time during the pandemic, again, a privilege that not many people had to reflect and self-reflect. And in a context where maybe it's different, and maybe not, to the one in the UK, the art scene, or the independent cultural organisations, were always constantly struggling for existence, for spaces, for the right to be to be acknowledged. So, in this context, the main question was, what to do in order to overcome that limit of you know, an institution that has to always live from grants, from one grant to another, from one project to another, and to give away many of those resources that were so hard for, to give them away to private property owner, let's say. So, there, it just came, sort of, organically the idea that we should not pay rent. And at the same time, we should also try to show that other models are possible for people like us, for artists, for cultural workers, how can we do it, and a group of the people who are also part of this life of the organisation, of life of the garden there, who are gardening and doing art projects, and doing life - life planning together, we bought a piece of land, and that was a big jump into the unknown. And it's a land that is not big, and it's in the proximity of the city of Bucharest. So, it's accessible by public transport, it allows us to have our lives in the city. We try to use the resources of the city as much as possible. So not to have the extractive not, yeah, the extractive approach that many people have in relation to land and to the rural. And it's not a retreat. It's a place that demands a lot of work. But also, because it's in this southern part of Romania, it's a great, unfortunately, a great test for experimenting on a process of desertification and what it actually means. It's, basically I am coming from the future, it's not just the previous voice that you heard, that comes from the future, but also how I feel, especially after this year, when there was a terrible drought. And you saw some of the pictures. Basically, the economy that I'm talking about is the economy of survival, and how will we manage? Because it's, to be frank, it's quite scary. And I would leave you with this pessimistic note, and I hope to be more clear when I answer questions, if there are any. Thank you.

33:58

[Clapping]

34:07 Fatoş Üstek

Yeah, I think we need both of optimism and pessimism, but I have a no - perhaps it would be important to give context to our audiences who might not know the transit network. Because it was also like with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the - you know, like the kind of support from the centralised Europe, and it was our Erste Bank, which was the kind of like the main supporter of this, like, let's say station of art, konstelace - almost konstelace model. Can you talk us a little bit about that?

34:37 Raluca Voinea

Yeah like making a very brief and compressed contextualization, let's say, so, Romania and Eastern Europe, where socialist countries, where arts were quite privileged situation. It was funded by the state completely with some limitations, but with a lot of privileges. But then the 90s came and first sort of different models to step in, was the one proposed by Soros Foundation, which established a series of contemporary art centres in the region. But coming also with an agenda, aesthetic and political and ideological. Some institutions managed to survive that were, that were formulated along those lines, and others did not. And then transit network came in the 2000s. So, a decade later, and it was all equally financed by a private body, financial body, the Erste Foundation, in the beginning, it was Erste Bank and now it's Erste Foundation. And they had a different approach. They went to the countries where the bank was present, which was sort of obvious, but they delegated the agenda, let's say, to local curators, and they entrusted them fully with deciding what their context needed. So as, as the network was established in 2000. So basically, 20 years ago, in 2002/2003, yes. And, and then it opened in the different countries, so it was Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria, and Romania joined in only 10 years later, because of the economic crisis of 2008, and the kind of slowing down of the pace. And then when we stepped in, it was already a different situation. And also geographically, when you look at the map, Romania was as large almost as all the other countries together. So, and also with a very different and complicated history and regional differences. So, transit Romania proposed from the beginning a different model. So instead of competing with each other for leading this organisation, we proposed the collaborative model. So, from the beginning transit Romania was a smaller network within the bigger network, decentralised without the normal centres in different cities in Romania, corresponding to the different regions. And actually, it was the same budget, but which we share - we split. So, we decided, we said, we are going to emphasise solidarity and sharing of resources rather than one of us taking it all. And it took a while but now it seems like many people understood this decision.

37:47

Fatoş Üstek

But it's also quite a radical decision in a way that, you know, like, yes, totally understandable that you were functioning and as the project ground system, where it's almost like you're like a hamster on a wheel that constantly, constantly needs to generate that kind of unsustainable financial reality. But also, at the same time now you're, you know, taking, I mean, it's very, I think it's very inspiring in a way that you kind of like wanted to step outside of this cyclical, because it's also part of that lineage of power dependency that institutions have been, you know, generating and being part of and being exposed to. So, it's quite interesting that now you're kind of like building this new model, where you're also, you know, you're also like exploring, in a way that's not like you have, you know, it's almost - what I'm trying to say is like, I feel like you're also like doing it practice-based more than like, kind of like applying a structure to this new model? Can you talk about the bit of thinking and the logic of this, like how this idea came about? And yeah.

38:59

Raluca Voinea

I think it was always practice-based, also the garden that we started in 2014, it was a space of learning, rather than applying some predefined principles. And the station, I think it's important to say that it's not only the place of transit, transit is just a small part of it. So, it's also a way of changing the relationship or the balance between who is the organisation and who does it work for. And I think the idea behind was not really sophisticated, it was just trying to escape this curse, let's say, of the of the Romanian context where independent cultural organisations have an average life - life span / lifetime of between three and five years, and the lucky ones get to live, let's say for 10 years, but that's considered to be an achievement. And, and then there is also no memory. So, these institutions, they disappear when they are a leader or whoever is part of them has a burnout or has decides to leave the country. And then everyone starts again from zero. So, it's very hard to build a memory and to, to build a foundation, basically. So, I just wanted to break this, this chain and to not so much the hamster wheel because once you are in it, you hardly have time to reflect on it. But this idea that you can maybe try to see if other ways are possible. And while you're doing it, because you have such limited time, you know, we, I think, I don't know, there was this discussion here about the seven years, I think you were mentioning the seven years - I, that's seven years, it's what the time we stayed in that rented space in Bucharest, and I gave ourselves another seven years to see if this new experimental project has any chance of meaning something not to succeed, there is no question of that, but at least to - to get to mean something. And, yeah, speaking of time, now, we go back to the previous panel, I think I totally didn't answer your question, but...

41:32 Fatoş Üstek

...that's, that's great. I like the seven years actually, because it's also you know, our body changes, all that cells every seven years, so it's also like, now we have an opportunity to renew ourselves as well as our institutions, I guess? So, I have a question that is to both of you and it's related to what you've been presenting, but also bringing in another awareness that we've been, you know, addressing, you know, like we are living in, in an era where we were kind of like facing multitude of crisis; crisis in money held finance, social justice. And so, the book that you also refer to by Kate Raworth, the *Doughnut Economics*, she's actually kind of like, maybe you might also have heard of her because she was taking part in the Gallery's Climate Coalition Second Summit, earlier this year, in March, I think, in London. And she what she's done is actually it's kind of like built two concentric circles that kind of, in a way inspire the shape of a doughnut. And those two concentric circles are the social foundation that is like food, shelter, healthcare, or the political wars that individuals need. And also, you know, the ecological ceiling in which we actually exist, that is water, energy, air. So, I think what she achieved with this diagram is this like illustration of interdependencies of resources and social wellbeing. So perhaps, if we could really respond to, you know, like this kind of like holistic thinking of our impact, because also Kate' Raworth also says that every decision is political, because whatever we decide, also has a social and ecological impact.

43:22 Torange Khonsari

I just, yeah, I mean, I think for me, one interesting framing that has slightly shifted is rather than thinking about projects, maybe we should think about resources that we are producing, or creating and who are those resources for? And how do we use - how do we see them as kind of assets that can really support not just us as artists, but also the communities within which we're, we're working. So, if that's land or knowledge, I think we're doing it actually, but, but we don't see it in that kind of governance, governed way, in which it can kind of operate at different political levels, potentially, than just in the art world. So, I suppose the interesting thing for me with the commons, was, was to actually look at, it's almost like what could cultural practices invoke in kind of a new political paradigm, you know? And - and then how can that if the commons is the sphere or most, which is the sphere of social practice or community engaged work, then it's not just artists that are doing that and struggling. There is also you know, community journalism, there is, you know, whatever architects who are doing it, there are all sorts of designers, you know, all sorts of people and somehow, I think this kind of notion of thinking that you're part of a bigger, bigger ecosystem. And as being part of that bigger ecosystem, maybe the networks become wider, and once they become wider, your economic breaths becomes bigger. So, one of the ways with within which I think public works, kind of does, you know, okay, we've had vulnerable, you know, precarious moments, but it's because we're kind of quite broad working with so

many different people, and then they fundraise, and, you know. So, I think that kind of networked, collective way of thinking that's also within the commons, rather than what we have as a default of an individualist kind of private society, which is what neoliberalism has. Although I'm not saying that's what everybody does, but I think that that then shifts it to collectively, if we're all working within a neighbourhood, you know, actually, what are the all the different resources that we are producing that, and how do we manage that? How do we think about that? How do we steward that? How do we use that as an asset, to continue working there, and so on? And so, I know that sounds really abstract. But - but yeah, so I think that and also, you know, the really important thing is that the sphere of community is where the social happens. It's, it's not the sphere of politics, yeah. So - so actually, where - where is our social happening? Is it in banks, where people are working, where they're kind of gaining their values and gaining how, what they spend their labour time in or, or working in public sector where it's, again, about having lots of power, or, you know, moving within the ranks or so? So, it's, it's a really interesting one to think about where we position ourselves in that macro, political context, and who are the alliances in a way? I don't know if that answers...

47:06 Fatoş Üstek

... that's great, actually. And so I think like, you know, the definition of local is changing. And also, community is not only specific to a specific geography or neighbourhood today, you know, like, we are also living in a time where we have massive, not, you know, like, we've adopted internet as a mass communication. And, and so there are communities that are being formed online, that are independent of their, you know, like residence, or even like, you know, let's say, cultural-social backgrounds. So for instance, I want to ask you as a, as you know, like, running this space that has an odd kind of like an embedded locality, but also has an international network of practitioners. How do you kind of like relate to what this circularity means for you that Torange is describing?

47:58 Raluca Voinea

Yeah, if you allow me, I would also like to add something in relation to the previous question with resources and also with I have worked before transit, I worked with some public art projects. And it was around that time in in Romania, you know, public space was really hard to define. And people were struggling with it, after having all these states centralised, until the 90s, and then massive privatisation, including of everything that was ever public. And around that time, also internationally, but especially in Romania, there was this discussion about shopping malls, for example, becoming semi-public places, and people sort of appropriating them for other uses, simply because there was nothing else for those specific uses, such as air conditioning, toilets, these kinds of things, which you know, when you think about it, it's insane. But even today, they do not exist as public facilities in the city or are very rare. So this is - it's really I think it differs, it depends a lot on

different societies and cities in how they are organised. But just not to see things as very clearly defined, helps us to see resources where they we might think they are not. And yeah, it's not about making allies. It's about appropriating something for - for other uses, especially when that something is sort of stolen from us, let's say.

49:35 Torange Khonsari

I mean, I agree, but I do think if one is like, I don't think anything so clear, but I think in a way, the you know, for those who are British, you know, the tenants and residents associations, for example here, and a lot of the public community infrastructures that were - that were set up, were very much modelled on the state and the way that the governance of the state. So, what then happened is that they were the same power structures were replicated within a state logic into a community sphere. And they kind of became some, some of them, not all of them, most of them, became quite problematic with fiefdoms, you know, becoming about power structures, and so on. So, I suppose my interest is not just to divide stuff and say you do this, and you do that, but it's more understanding that the logics are quite different. And then how do you work across them? Once you once you know that? Because? Yeah, I mean, that's, I suppose that's, that's, that's been really useful for - for my practice otherwise. And there are two different descriptions, theoretical descriptions of common good. There's the communal common good, which is what we all are aware of, which is what us as a society think is good for us all. And I have a little bit of an issue with that, because that can get coopted really badly. So, for example, the market is apparently a common good, and because we're all participate - all participating in the market, then we are we are all civic agents. You know, this is kind of the neoliberal lingo. Whereas then there's the distributive common good, which is goods that we produce in action, collaboratively and collectively for the good of that specific area, or community or whatever. And that's the one I'm kind of interested in. And that's the communal common good goes very much close to a public common good. And, and so I think, I think it's, and then, you know, public life is quite different, you know, and public interest can be in the commons, yeah. And so, it's, it's not simple, but I just think it's good to think about it.

51:56 Raluca Voinea

Yeah, I guess along these lines, I could answer your other question. And, you know, if you look at what we do at the moment, we tried to maintain this land, you know, this piece of land to give, give it some life, it was a monoculture that was cultivated there before. And it's okay also to feed the people. You have to do that, especially now with a war nearby. Yeah, I mean, this is a bracket, but I was even wondering, did we do right in stopping this cultivation of wheat, for example? Because just when we start, we did it, it the war started in Ukraine, and then basically, all the exports of wheat from Ukraine or were stopped. And Romania was brought again as, as one of the main sources. So, it's always very contextual, somehow what you do, it's never

good in itself. It's good for that time, or bad for that time. Yes. So yeah, we maintain this land and we try to build the garden, we try to see if it's possible to talk about biodiversity on a such a small scale, you know, you cannot restore it only on your defined piece of land, it needs to be seen as interdependent, wider context, but at least we can test some things, we can show some processes. And it's, it's really very little like when you look at the, the big scale of things and how, especially at the way, destruction operates on a much bigger and faster scale. You feel completely disempowered. If you look at it from this position, it's useless, completely useless. So you could just as well do nothing. But then when you see that what you do is done also by people across the street from you, but also, like you say internationally, yeah. And not only in your immediate reach, yeah. Then it's, it's a question of seeing how these little actions for the good they, they when you see them in this invisible spider web. And you see they actually mean much more through their coexistence in time, let's say, and then it's become the garden that we have started to build this called cosmos. And this is this comes from a flower that you probably all know called cosmos bipinnatus which is a flower originating from Mexico. It has an indigenous name, which we still have to remember. And it's a plant that has travelled everywhere in the world and everywhere it went it became very locally rooted. It got a local name, and it's very dear to every gardener because it's beneficial for the garden, for the insects, for the other plants. And we gave the name, of course most because this is how we see ourselves also very locally rooted. But with this eye open - the words, yeah, cosmopolitan in a way. But in, in a sense of being part of this, you know this wider world and this community of initiatives, let's say, even if we don't know each other with many of them, but we also try to establish networks and cooperations.

55:31 Fatoş Üstek

That's very beautiful is almost like being attuned to the universe as well, in some way. I want to ask a provocative question. Wow. Five minutes, No way.

55:41

[Inaudible]

55:46 Fatoş Üstek

Really, we started late, I have so many questions. [Laughter] Okay, okay. I'll ask my burning ones. So, one provocative question. So how can we when we are talking about common good, also, you know, like, especially your definition, or is very helpful Torange - how can we also diverge from utilitarian thinking and functional outlines or serving a purpose expectations? Because art also, sometimes, you know, like, I think it's better when it is not completely mappable, translatable and transactional?

No, absolutely. Yeah. So, I suppose that, for me is how the project is intent, the intention of the project - art project I just talked about whether we should talk about projects now - I'm contradicting myself. But I suppose it's where the intention of the work is. And I always talk about actually engagement as a craft, you know, community participation is a craft, and it's sometimes not, but I think most of the time is not seen, that's why we start to have these mechanical words sometimes, like co-production and, and so on, which are useful words, but so I think it just depends. I mean, if you're going into a community without an agenda, and you're just saying, okay, I'm just going to listen, and then see what happens, then, then, then, very different, you know, they're not problem orientated, necessarily, maybe problems do arise, but, and I go back, I mean, this is kind of my particular - our particular practice, which is how do we deploy? Actually, not just art but creative tools, or cultural - cultural practices, let's say, as a way to frame a different, yeah, different political sphere. Because so if you if you say, okay, I'm going to give a given example, if we have, say, 12 community organisations in a neighbourhood so that neighbourhood in Bow, that's 20,000 people, if you have 11 or 12 community groups that you are engaging with, I don't know what the art will be. At the end, it might be a massive festival, it might be a citizens assembly, like - like we saw with Suzanne - or - but what that does, if there is a way that what because there's also always conflicts now within these kinds of there's territorial things happening, fiefdoms, you know, all sorts of things, but if you want to rise against a system that you think is not actually supporting what - what as a society we're lacking or the crises that you're talking about that we're going through, that is a power structure. And so of federalism in a way where you like, if you develop a community development trust and this takes a lot of time, where there is one in Hackney Wick between, for the creative enterprise zone with a different cultural institutions and organisations that are quite bottom up, then that has a different kind of voice, it has different - you can keep private or public sector accountable in a different way, you know, and so on and so forth. So, actually, the production of the commons, for me is part of the practice, which can be art, can be architecture can be, design can be whatever, and I would work with, you know, anyone within the that kind of field. I completely get your point around instrumentalisation I totally get it. But, but in a way, I'm more interested in impact. Not these kind of not getting hung up with these kind of maybe there could be artists are not doing this at all. And that's obviously it's completely great. But it's like what is - what are we achieving at the end? You know, what is the ultimate goal? I mean, that's what I kind of start to think about. So where is the agency of the work? And where - where do we want to influence? And if it's the art world, then that question becomes more pertinent. If it's in politics, probably I don't know, yet we can critique it. But, you know, so it's sphere of influence, I suppose.

1:00:39 Fatoş Üstek

And I got really cool was saying about the context and the circumstances, I guess. Do you want to answer that question?

1:00:47 Raluca Voinea

Maybe I don't know, maybe it's just an oblique answer, or no answer at all. But I feel like I - like I should be adding it. It's because I'm looking, I'm constantly looking at this question, how can we thrive and I don't want to bring it up as a biblical metaphor, but you'll probably all know it, this transformation of know, actually the multiplication of the breads and have the facia, it's a, it's a biblical story of creating more with less basically. And, in a way, this is what we did with transit in the early years, we took something that apparently was less - lesser for each one of us, and then multiplied it and made it into a real resource. And I think if we look at what we have, or what we call resources, in the same way, we should look at knowledge. I'm not saying that it is with knowledge, again, is the problem that it's sort of privatised and capitalised and sliced. So, if we look at it, yeah, as this interconnected system that we should rather share, then then, like, see it as something little of which we can make more, you know, it's something that we should not, we should not own. But we should co-use, and we should make transparent. I think that's, that's how we can thrive. Yeah, by simply abandoning this idea that things are separate disciplines are separate. Knowledge is separate, and water from the soil is separate from the water from the rain; it is not. And once we understand this, we start to look at it differently. I you know, it's just common sense what I'm saying. But it's just, when I'm saying it, I actually see it in the way it unfolds in, in this very particular place. And I see that it's not just - it's basically this wisdom that people used to have and has been lost because of how modernity understood to practice this privatisation of everything that was ever commons.

1:03:11 Fatoş Üstek

That's very, very beautiful. Thank you. I actually want to also kind of like my last question before we open the floor for questions, or can I ask you that question? Oh, okay. Yeah, okay. We have to finish quarter two, I guess. Okay, fine. So, I can't ask my last question. Is there any questions that want to that? Is there any questions from the floor? I'll also check the Slido, but do you spot any hands Jack? Okay, swiping up. Oh, wow. Okay. So, we have 11 questions. Yeah, okay. There is a governance question that is asking: so what are the challenges and opportunities of working in an organisation with a flat structure, such as everyone being a director, I think maybe for public works, Torange or we could also...?

1:04:17 Torange Khonsari

So, the, okay, the initial challenge at because we were, there was two of us as founding members left. The first challenge was to give up the being actually, you know, we talk about giving up power and things like that, but actually doing it is a very different thing than talking about it. So it was very painful. I cried for two days, and then and then it's the best thing I have ever done. They're amazing. But I think the challenges is not being, because we're everywhere, not being in the same space together a lot. That's kind of one of the challenges. So we have to make real effort to meet four times a year to make sure we kind of can know what everyone's doing. It's completely decentralised in terms of aesthetics. So it becomes a bit challenging, because you might kind of go, oh, not sure if I like that. But then it doesn't matter, right? That's the whole point of having pluralist aesthetics. So that's definitely a challenge. I think it's also a challenge when you people go off to do PhDs, but they're still directors or they're not they're working fully in an institution. And the 20% pot gets reduced, because they're not bringing income. And we haven't really had this sounds really weird, but we haven't had massive disagreements in terms of how we should govern, or, or do things. So that that hasn't happened. But that might be because a lot of the people who've become public works, we've worked together for a very long time. So, we probably have quite a lot of common values. I don't know.

1:06:10 Fatoş Üstek

Do you have like a charter of principles?

1:06:12 Torange Khonsari

Yes, yes. And that so. So, this is a really interesting thing. We are a non for profit, limited company. And the governance of the culture of how the organisation runs has been written into the legal one. And that one changes all the time. So, we change that it's in flux all the time, whereas the legal one, you can't change it. It's kind of legal. So that's an interesting bit.

1:06:40 Fatoş Üstek

I have one provocative question from an anonymous audience member. Is there ever no agenda for working in public realm for the organisation doing the work?
[Laughter]

1:06:57 Raluca Voinea

No agenda? No, of course not. You always have an agenda, whether it's your personal one or institutional or is set by someone else, or is simply given by the context in which you live with you. If you see the agenda, also, as a kind of

motivation for working, or for doing anything. This is the good way of seeing it. And the fact that, actually now there are some really bad guys who are doing our agenda for everyday life, yeah, with their actions that are completely unaccountable and tend to become more and more unaccountable. So this is you - you also live by the agenda dictated by others. Okay, what is the point where you can extract yourself from that where you can try to say, no, let's make our own agenda? Is it really possible - I think, with some compromises, you will always there's always some compromises that you have to make, whether you will look at the money that you get where it comes from, like it was the discussion in the previous panel, maybe you want to have less money than to have money from I don't know, which oligarchs but then in the end, there is no clean money. So it's a somehow also a dead end the discussion about this. It's really, the agenda is a very hot topic. It's worth a panel in itself.

1:08:26 Fatoş Üstek

Thank you. So now that we have two minutes, I'm going to make my last question a comment. *[Laughter]* So it's actually because I've been interviewing a lot of people for my book, it's like more than 50 directors and senior curators from all over the world who are involved in institutions inside and outside. And I want to bring to your attention, Manuel Borja-Villel, and who is the Co-artistic director of the current São Paulo Biennial, and he was the director of Brenda Sofia Museum in Madrid for many years. And I think what he suggests perhaps could be quite interesting, he could also contemplate and ponder upon afterwards is that especially in the context of art institutions, this kind of like plausibility of producing a queer space, because he observes of the current situation that the art institutions are in, and he says that "the autonomous space that we are currently yearning for is charged by two conflicting practices at the moment". And one of the one of the practices is the kind of like the modernist bourgeois, yeah, modernists bourgeois approach to art institutions and museums for them to become you know, like spaces for critical thinking, contemplation, and that would kind of like emanate, you know, like art encounters that would leave the audiences in awe. And then on the other hand, institutions are under the issue of instrumentalisation of culture where the art market and the identitarian essentialism comes that are, you know, opportunistic propositions for artists, social, you know, like artistic, social and political approaches or agendas is taking the place. So yeah, that's basically where I - I will end the question to all of you is like, what kind of future are we actually producing with an awareness that we're building in this new century? Thank you.

1:10:33

[Clapping]

1:10:33 Fatoş Üstek

And thank you so much.