

MAHALLA 2018

Generating Cultural Narratives

Organizer - diyalog dernegi, Istanbul

Format - panel, round table, readings, performance, exhibition, workshop, concert

Date – second half of November 2018

Mission

The upcoming festival will give the opportunity to update the network of European cultural initiatives working in the field of migration, exile and inclusion. It will bring together native communities and newcomers. The festival will be also a platform with concrete results how these initiatives and cultural mediators want to operate in Europe and beyond in future.

Different artistic positions and cultural initiatives (Fine Arts, Literature, Film, Music, Theater) will be introduced and combined to form new narratives regarding mobility, culture and identity.

Location: Why Malta?

The location of the Maltese island between Italy and Africa where most refugees are passing the Mediterranean on the way to Europe is a reason for our decision. So one focus will be Africa/North-Africa, the Mediterranean and the inclusion of these cultures even in communities with nationalistic attitudes as observed right now not only in some Eastern European countries.

The narration of trans-nationalism and a new understanding of international solidarity and hospitality is one of the strong topics not only for Maltese artists and poets investigating the borders of languages, artists exploring and twisting visual symbolism.

Main Topics and Formats

- **Language and the narration of borders**, Readings, Film-Screenings, Lectures
- **Communities and Diversity**, Film-Screenings, Presentations, Social Events
- **New City Cultures and Cultural Institutions**, Lecture, Exhibition, Concert
- **Mobile Citizenship**, Lecture, Exhibition, Screening
- **Future Demands and Requirements in the Cultural Field**, Round Table, Panel

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Mission and results of the Mahalla Festival 2017 in Istanbul

The first Mahalla festival took place in September 2017 in the frame of parallel events of the 15th Istanbul Biennial organized by the Turkish association diyalog dedicated to migration, exile and cultural identity.

The title of the festival refers to the word *mahalla* used in many languages and countries meaning neighborhood or location originated in Arabic *māhallā*, from the root meaning 'to settle', 'to occupy' derived from the verb *halla* (to untie), as in untying a packhorse or camel to make a camp.

The main questions of this first festival were: how can artists and people working in the cultural fields act to strengthen international solidarity towards the worldwide migration crisis? How can sustainable networks (in Europe and beyond) be build up and which aims should they have regarding this topic? Which specific questions, methods and forms can cultural institutions and artists contribute to this political challenge?

The 37 participants from 16 countries presented their experiences, practices and expectations regarding migration, exile and cultural identity. Exhibitions, film screenings and a concert accompanied and inspired round tables and public discussions. Experiences from the respective countries and areas of activity were exchanged, and approaches and examples for the development of new narratives in exile were presented.

The participants developed certain expectations and agreed on some central principles regarding the development of a network:

- A sustainable European network of artists and cultural operators has to operate multifunctional: artistic practice, international discourses and practical strategies for performing political requirements have to be elaborated
- Artists with a migration background shouldn't be stigmatized as refugee-artists: They are international artist, who are exiled out of different reasons.
- Cooperative projects in between artists form different cultural backgrounds generate synergies. The migrant's individual stories shouldn't be isolated and abused to generate themes and facilities for other artists or organizations.
- Migrants from crisis regions are a central source for understanding global conflicts. Social and inclusion oriented projects are the main strategy in Europe to cope with the refugee crisis. The combination of both is serving a better understanding of the realities of migrants and raises the respect towards them in the native communities.
- The current crisis can be used as a challenge to accelerate new narrations. Instead of isolating the results of a global political and humanitarian dystopia to the refugee crisis the field of arts and culture should create new intersections: questioning the nation state concept for example triggers the research on intercultural historical heritage and the questioning of the representation of political power in all fields of existence. Topics like racism, diversity and multiculturalism, the dysfunctions of globalization, the transformation of urban spaces and the possibilities of the digital cyberspace are providing a wide field for all kinds of artistic disciplines.
- Public funding is to some degree unavoidable for certain cultural events or for project developments and should be supported by institutional cooperation's in between the upcoming network. From the experience of all participants they imply strong dependencies regarding forms and content and the scheduling of artistic practices though. The development of independent structures through local initiatives and cooperation's on the local, national and

international field are highly intended. Institutions like the “Trampoline House” in Copenhagen convinced everybody in Istanbul due to their intercultural, communal and empowering orientation and independent structure.

As a result of the festival in Istanbul, the participants expressed the need to establish a sustainable European network for the exchange of experiences between cultural initiatives and artists of the host countries and the newcomers and to have a following international festival November 2018.

Why Malta

- Maltese culture is generally considered to be a mix of influences brought to the island by the various rulers it has seen come and go over many centuries. It is a fact that the Phoenicians, Romans and Arabs, the French and the British all left their stamp on the customs and traditions of the Maltese and Malta’s history.
- Maltese is a unique language with a Semitic grammar written with Latin letters. It is descended from Siculo-Arabic, the extinct variety of Arabic that developed in Sicily and was later introduced to Malta. Maltese is also unique among Semitic languages since its morphology has been deeply influenced by Romance languages, namely Italian and Sicilian.

The narration of trans-nationalism and a new understanding of international solidarity and hospitality is one of the strong topics of a young generation of Maltese poets investigating language without borders. The Maltese poet, translator, and creative activist Antoine Cassar with his multilingual poem *Merħba, a poem of hospitality* is one example. He was born to Maltese parents in London and grew up between England, Malta and Spain.

Studio Solipsis in Rabat is a centre for the exploration of the new trends in literature and language during Valetta 2018. It is also a partner and Venue of the Mahalla Festival that wants to introduce writers, linguists and artists to explore the potential of language in the creation of new narrations.

- Under these circumstances and because of the small size of the country some basic questions of the festival in Malta will be: can the mix of influences in Malta help to understand community relations, whether local or host community relations? What are the requirements of openness and positive negotiation of characteristics that mark one’s social and cultural identity? Can Malta become a model for community relations in a positive or negative sense in the Mediterranean and Europe?

Mission

The festival in Malta will be dedicated to mobility, exile and inclusion.

Different artistic positions (Fine Arts, Literature, Film, Music, Performing Arts) will be introduced and combined to form new narratives regarding culture, identity and the construction of it on a personal, national, international and intellectual level trying to overcome the divisions that still exists between nations, religions and ethics, between newcomers and host communities.

In the current reality the freedom of traveling virtually in the century of the Internet theoretically dissolved borders. In practice the existence of borders and Visa regulations creates an unequal access to the freedom of mobility.

The Festival will question the reasons and results for and of a globalized world fractioned in nation states, national and international institutions, alliances, lobbies and a globalized civil society reduced to an anonymous mass of voters for different entities.

Objectives

The festival focuses on unconditional hospitality that one needs to experiences when on a journey whether it be by chance or unwittingly when arriving in a new location or new neighborhood. Hospitality is a fundamental mark of civilization, where the stranger's right to protection and shelter has been honored since time immemorial. This meaning of hospitality centers on the belief that strangers should be assisted and protected while traveling.

Against the background of today's migration crisis caused by terror, civil war and natural disasters hospitality as a micro-universe is exemplifying some of the challenges we face in terms of coexistence today. The festival raises the question if today hospitality is still a matter of protection and survival or if it is more associated with etiquette and politics; further on it will discuss how the concept of hospitality can be still proposed as a main criteria for free circulation, mobility of people, cultural values and enrichment of communities.

The festival will bring together artists, musicians and cultural players from Europe and its neighboring countries in order to promote inclusion and diversity.

Title and Conceptual Frame

"Generating Cultural Narratives"

The Mahalla festival 2018 invites cultural initiatives and artists to revise the concept of classifications and border settings in historical, political, esthetical and discursive dimensions. Patterns of identity classified in races or ethnics, gender roles, language conventions, melody-forms, storylines, choreographies and visualization conventions can be quoted, transformed, ridiculed or overtaken. The main topics identity, exile and migration are alignments.

The general vision of the festival is to question a dystopian reality of excluding the other in the form of the migrant, the opponent, the animal, and the environment.

The concept for the artistic production is free for metaphorical interpretations in any direction.

The participants of the Festival in Malta are invited to pick up the idea of transforming Dystopia in any kind of form or media. The main task is to reflect how communication styles are working out narratives about identity, cultural references, territorial borders, the right for or restriction of mobility, the possibilities of personal development and the participation in public representations connected to the results of communication in a globalized world characterized by a certain dualism regarding the access to resources, mobility, technology and safety.

Migration Pressure - Cultural and Political Strategies

Since around 2001 every year tens of thousands of migrants and asylum seekers cross the Mediterranean Sea in hope of reaching Europe. Some of them end up on the small island of Malta which means a crisis for this small, crowded country that as a nation is smaller than most of the big European cities.

The EU's leaders gathered in Malta in February 2017 under the auspices of Malta's EU Presidency to find solutions to the migratory pressures. The final declaration forgoing would-be asylum seekers and refugees coming from Africa back to "hell on Earth" in Libya was being condemned by human rights organizations as an outright abuse of human rights and international law. We as cultural initiatives also condemn this practice where migrants being pushed back to Libyan shores are facing torture, rape, slavery and killings.

There is no political solution visible. The absence of a humanitarian strategy is accompanied by lots of disinformation. The Western EU-governments are declaring countries like Libya and Turkey as safe spaces for refugees. Rising violence and attacks caused in Europe are reduced on the impact of migration in the public opinion, while these developments are much more linked to international conflicts spilling over to Europe. The migrants are victims of these and a valuable source for the understanding of complex realities linked to crisis regions. The strengthening of the possibilities and involvements of dissidents from the artistic and cultural fields is one of the central objectives of the Mahalla Festival.

What we need:

- Opening up legal immigration routes to Europe; beyond asylum and refugee protection, people from crisis regions should also be given the opportunity to apply in their countries of origin for a stay in Europe for education, vocational training, study programs or to start work.
- Concepts that are geared towards improving the labor market situation in the countries of origin and reducing imbalances in economic relations.
- Strategies to explore the potential of an intercultural approach to inclusion in communities with culturally diverse populations.
- Taking translation and migration as related phenomena of mobility of texts, international transfer of knowledge and transformation in the field of cultural memories.
- Empowering cultural institutions in the areas of the fine and performing arts, music and literature in Europe into places of diversity. The aim is to actively include the controversial, but promising issues of immigration and cultural diversity into these institutions.
- Overcoming the concept of nation states and developing models for a mobilized citizenship with freedom of movement.

The Format of the Mahalla Festival 2018

The Mahalla Festival will invite artists from different disciplines and cultural workers and initiatives to present their experiences and narrations in round tables, lectures, workshops, screenings, exhibitions, readings and concerts. The Festival 2018 will focus on the following topics and formats:

Language and Migration

Readings, Film-Screenings, Lectures

Maltese language is descended from Siculo-Arabic and is the only Semitic language that has always been written in the Latin script. In addition half of the vocabulary is derived from standard Italian and English words make up to 20% of vocabulary.

Against this background this section of the festival dedicated to literature will present in readings and lectures examples about the question, what does it mean writing in another language and researching a non-linear process of translation.

In lectures and readings the participants will present translation and migration as related phenomena: as mobility of texts, international transfer of knowledge and transformation in the field of cultural literacy.

Examples can be but no only

- German Poet and Translator Achim Wagner is a specialist on translating in between German and Turkish poetry and is underlining the similarity of metaphors. Matthias Görizt and Efe Duyan do a reading of each others poems translated
- Reading by Antoine Cassar, *Merħba, a poem of hospitality*
- Writer Samar Yazbek, Syria, talks about exile
- Writer Igiaba Scego, Italy/Somalia cultural dialogue and migration characterizing the delicate balance between her two cultural realities, the Italian and Somalian.

Communities and Diversity

Film-Screenings, Presentations, Social Events

Freedom to express one's cultural identity can be a powerful way to maintain a community's mental and even physical health. Freedom of expression is also a right and, as our language of assistance moves from needs-based to rights-based, respect for the empowering forms of cultural expression should inform our thinking and planning.

This section addresses strategies and concepts that brings together asylum seekers and local citizens, migrants and native residents, united by a desire to express adventures of journey, the other and the self with creative tools.

In Workshops of Short-Film-making, Photography and Story-telling participants will explore their environments and memories and will learn in small groups to develop methods of individual and/or collective storytelling in different media.

The results of these workshops established and realized in Malta and by partner initiatives in Europe and beyond will be presented during the festival. The results will be compared, discussed and evaluated in public talks; future concepts and improvements will be evolved in how to learn and use creative tools as filmmaking in mixed groups to create an environment of diversity.

Examples can be but no only

- Screening of results of Short-Film Workshop with mixed groups of migrants and local communities in Malta
- Exhibition: Results of a Photo Workshop by Darrin Zammit-Lupi
- Street Party with Ghoula, Tunisian composer living in Paris addicted to old Arabic records, he starts a dialogue with every generation, giving voice back to the oldest souvenirs, with workshop and an informal jamming session with local musicians like Francesco Sultana, Rabat

New City Cultures and Cultural Institutions

Lecture, Exhibition, Concert

Cultural organizations in Europe (e.g. museums of art, theater) are just starting to address the cultural diversity of their cities in their programs, personnel decisions and targeted audiences.

This section of the festival presents examples and innovations by cultural institutions that integrate issues of immigration and cultural diversity into their program and their city cultures, and thereby reduces infrastructural exclusion in the cultural sector.

It means as well approaches to rethink cultural heritage, its collection and presentation into a source of inspiration to local communities and newcomers and vice versa.

Examples can be but no only

- Lecture: German Federal Cultural Foundation about the 360 ° Fund For New City Cultures, to promote diversity in cultural organizations in Germany with practical examples
- Sandro Debono: Featuring Muza - Manifesto for European public art museums
- Screening or Presentation of the Festival Nordwind, Displaced without moving, Multicultural Festival of Performing Arts at Kampnagel Hamburg, as a utopian alternative to the dogma of a bipolar separation of body and spirit, sensuality and intelligence, pop culture and folklore
- Introduction of the independent Art Space Loading in Diyarbakır, founded by artist Erkan Özgen

Mobile Citizenship

Lecture, exhibition, screening

If landscapes are not ruled by centralized governments anymore but by regional forces, the individual should not be a citizen of a fixed country any longer. Instead, its „nationality“ should change with the individual moving. By spending holidays in Las Vegas or escaping a conflict area to a hosting location, persons would become temporary citizens of these areas, holding the same rights and duties as the old-established population.

What are the conditions, opportunities and perspectives of this mobile citizenship are the questions of this section.

This section presents as well examples of cultural projects, decolonized hubs, urban concepts, floating islands and hanging tents as future models and condition for mobile citizenship.

Examples can be but no only

- The multicultural Art Center *La Colonie* founded by artist Kadir Attia in Paris
- An exhibition, the *Moving Austrian Pavillon* by artist Katharina Swoboda, featuring Kamen Stoyannov, Voin de Voin and others.
- The Tree Tents by *Tentsile*, London, as a concept for mobility
- Performance by Palestine artist Khaled Jarrar, exploring the impact of modern-day power struggles on ordinary citizens
- *Archive of Migrant Memories*, Italy
- Raphael Vella, the Archipelago as a platform discussing insularity, utopia, success, marginality and escape
- Leopold Lambert's Manifesto for an Alternative Cartography and Territorial Sovereignty

Future Demands and Requirements in the Cultural Field

Round table and final panel

In the round table and final panel the participating cultural initiatives, creative professionals and cultural players will express future requirements when working in the field of migration, exile and cultural identity - financially, logistically and in content.

Steps will be identified how to update the existing network of initiatives and players beyond ordinary platforms in social media, websites or occasionally gatherings.

Strategies will be developed that can create future cultural identities in local communities beyond national borders and nationalism. A final manifesto will be published.

Cooperation Partner and Venues in Malta

MUZA: Malta's new museum of art and a democratic platform to empower critical thinking in Malta.

- Hosting of main events – talks, screenings, presentation, performance, exhibition?
- curatorial adviser of the section **New City Cultures and Cultural Institutions** and **Language and Migration**
- collaborating resource in kind for promotion and coordination and set up of events
- participant

Foundation for Shelter and Support to Migrants

- curatorial adviser and coordinator of the section **Communities and Diversity**
- participant

Rima – Malta: anthropological and artistic project exploring the multifaceted aspects of migration and exile.

- curatorial adviser of the section **Communities and Diversity**
- coordination of workshops in Malta with participants with and without migration background
- participant

Curatorial School Malta, at the Valletta Campus, University of Malta

- curatorial adviser and coordinator of the section **Language and Migration** and all others
- participant

Studio Solipsis

- curatorial adviser of the section **Language and Migration and Communities and Diversity**
- Hosting of smaller events
- participant

International Partners

Artists at Risk, Athen/Berlin/Helsinki

Arthere, Istanbul

Diyalog, Istanbul

MarsIstanbul

Foreign Local Artistic Xchange – FLAX, Frankfurt

Trampoline House, Copenhagen

Villa Romana, Florence

Archive of Migrant Memories, AMM, Rome

Nation 25, Venice

Makan Art Space, Amman/Brussels

Al-Khareef Theatre Troupe, Amman/Marseille

La Colonie, Paris

SAAVY Contemporary, Berlin, the laboratory of form-ideas

La Colonie, Paris

Festival Istanbul-Marseille

Istanbul, 28.12.2017