


Toolbox for Conducting Drama Labs in Urban Development

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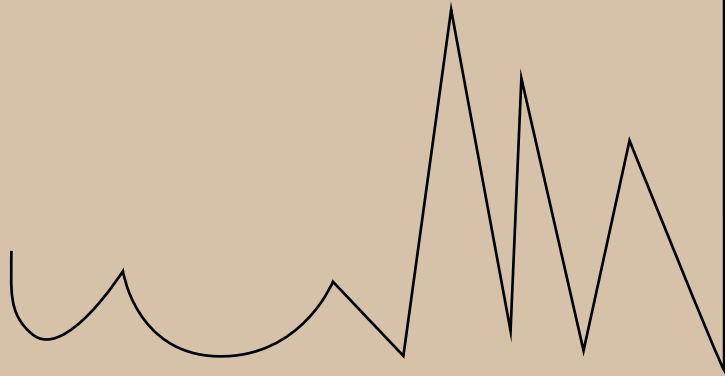


An abstract line drawing on a yellow background. The drawing consists of several thin, black, curved lines that flow from the top left towards the bottom right. These lines form a series of connected, organic shapes that resemble a stylized, flowing path or a series of connected loops. The overall effect is one of movement and fluidity.

Toolbox for Conducting Drama Labs In Urban Development

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The dos and don'ts of this toolbox



What is this?

This is a toolbox for municipalities and other urban governance actors that are interested in experimenting with new participatory tools that draw on theatre-based methods for engaging with conflicts and tensions in urban development. The toolbox can be used in both formal and informal processes, when different stakeholders need to be consulted or involved. It does not provide 'one right way' of doing things but offers a 'mindset' – different inspirations and ways of thinking – that gives a fresh take on the possibilities and challenges at hand.

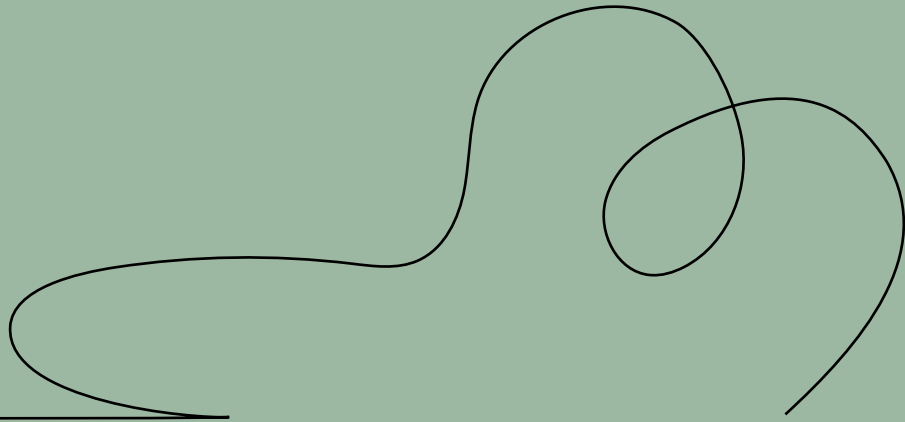
DO

- ⊕ Do use this toolbox to better accommodate and negotiate conflict of interests, values and perspectives among stakeholders in urban development processes.
- ⊕ Do use this toolbox to enable stakeholders to experiment with new perspectives through theatre-based methods.
- ⊕ Do use this toolbox to better understand what kinds of tensions or conflicts may result in resistance or inspire change.
- ⊕ Do use this toolbox to enrich decision making processes with new voices and perspectives.

DON'T

- ⊖ Don't see this toolbox as a solution to conflicts in urban development.
- ⊖ Don't use this toolbox as a one-size-fits-all solution to urban challenges.
- ⊖ Don't use this toolbox as a ready-made set of expertise, using these tools effectively requires practice and reflexive engagement.
- ⊖ Don't expect that using this toolbox requires all participants to have theatre or acting talents or experiences.

Drama Labs: the tools of this toolbox



From Urban Living Labs to Drama Labs

The toolbox gives you tools and methods for conducting *Drama Labs* in your local context. The Drama Lab is a new form of Urban Living Lab. Urban Living Labs are known for providing innovative arenas that bring together a range of different stakeholders to solve a specific urban problem or challenge through hands-on processes. However, in practice the Urban Living Labs often fall short of addressing complex issues and the diverse interests of residents. This is because they are too solution-oriented and tend to be dominated by the most powerful stakeholders. Drama Labs therefore expand the practices and methods of Urban Living Labs in two ways:

- 1 by using tools developed in the field of theatre;
- 2 by moving beyond the narrow focus of finding practical solutions to particular problems, aiming instead to broaden our understanding of what constitutes the problem in the first place.

Combining theatre and conflict

The Drama Labs play on the word 'drama' which denotes both theatre and conflict. That is, Drama Labs use theatre to put urban development into a tangible and playful setting. Drama Labs connect a broad range of stakeholders (for example, young and old, planner and resident, developer and shop-owners) to explore different views on what should happen within an area, giving room for both agreement and disagreement.

The value of theatre

Theatre enables stakeholders to express themselves and communicate in ways that extend beyond the rational and objective arguments that are favoured in traditional participatory processes. Theatre offers tools to communicate sensory and embodied experiences. This is important for expressing and understanding emotions, connections and disconnections, and for expressing personal stories that might not otherwise be told. This means that in theatre there is no hierarchy of the senses: hearing, feeling, touching or moving can be just as important as cognitively understanding or talking about a topic. Theatre is also about taking on roles and training the imagination to see the world from a perspective that is not one's own. These 'role shifts' (for example, a developer taking on the role of a resident and seeing the area through their eyes, or a citizen taking on the role of a politician and seeing an issue through their eyes) enable stakeholders to better understand each other and the issues concerning the development area. Theatre can also sketch pictures of surprising futures or alternative realities and therewith question assumptions of what is deemed 'common' or 'normal'.

Many formats

The Drama Labs have many different formats. A Drama Lab can be a public intervention in urban space; a role-play at a theatre venue; a workshop in the community hall; a guided conversation at a local school. What these formats have in common is that they use theatre and arts-based practice to make an artistic setting that invites participants to explore an issue from a different perspective than they are used to. For example, it could be through a fictional scenario that: approaches the issue from a different point in time (near past or distant future); introduces non-human perspectives such as that of 'the car' or 'the tree' or 'the historic building'; stages a fictional political debate or election in which the participants take on roles of a city official or mayor; makes visible tensions between multiple future visions; or embodies issues through physical activity, for example staging power and trust relations by one of the participants holding the nail and the other one hitting it with a hammer. It is highly recommended that professional theatre-makers are consulted or involved in the creation of these artistic settings as they have the expertise needed to represent issues in new, imaginative and unexpected ways.



The role of Drama Labs in the planning process



Carefully consider where in the planning process to situate the Drama Labs. The Drama Lab cannot be expected to result in a solution to a problem or to produce an outcome that is embraced by everyone. You should therefore be cautious about making promises to stakeholders about how potential outcomes will be integrated in the planning process. Communication on what the Drama Lab is and isn't is vital to not disappoint or mislead participants.

Positioning within formal and informal legal planning processes

The position of the Drama Lab within the formal process of decision making depends on the jurisdiction in which it is located. Within many jurisdictions, participation in decision making is highly formalised. In Belgium, for instance, the procedure mostly comes down to inviting citizens to lodge complaints and respond to a decision that is prepared and presented by the authorities. A formal role for the Drama Lab is not very feasible in such a formalised process. In the Netherlands and Norway, on the other hand, participation is organised in more direct ways than merely allowing the public to formulate objections. Here, a Drama Lab can fulfil the requirement to organise direct stakeholder participation, especially in the beginning of the planning process. However, also in formalised jurisdictions, such as the Belgian one, Drama Labs can be organised as part of an informal participatory process. Here, Drama Labs can provide an accessible way to involve citizens without requiring them to take a clear cut position on a given plan or project in advance.



Towards experimentation and adaptivity in planning

Drama Labs, with their focus on embodied learning and experimentation, are well-suited for spatial planning frameworks that value participation and wish to foster societal resilience and adaptivity. Experimentation with the drama lab In such systems can function as part of a feedback loop in the ongoing dialogue between project initiator, administration and stakeholders. Here, it makes differences in interests, values and perspectives explicit and brings out potential conflicts. It thereby makes these addressable in a way that fosters a resilient and open community.

Institutionalising the Drama Lab more fully in the legal base of the planning system is a way to formally incorporate 'double loop learning'. Double loop learning means learning how to change decision making rules and established roles in light of new experience. Especially wicked problems such as climate change call for these forms of higher order learning processes, because they force us to abandon established solutions and accept new social realities. This learning process may prepare the ground for a more inclusive and more participatory planning system altogether.

What do you get from conducting a Drama Lab?

- + Broad insight into potential lines of conflict that may be relevant in a given development
- + New methods to better deal with conflict in transformation processes
- + The opportunity to harvest the capacity that difference and conflict have to create involvement among actor networks in a given development
- + An inclusive arena that accommodates emotions (dreams, fears and anxiety) in addition to more 'rational' and technical arguments
- + The opportunity to uncover hidden interests, values or concerns and desires of the community on a specific case
- + A broader basis for action that creates greater understanding that there are different interests, values and perspectives in a planning process
- + More creativity and unexpected avenues to explore in the planning process
- + A playful arena that can bring people together across roles, age and class, and create new relationships and synergies
- + The opportunity to become a pioneer municipality within participatory and arts-based methods
- + A state of the art method to engage in citizen participation

Key tools for planning the Drama Lab



Tools for responding to the local context

It is key that the Drama Lab understands and actively works with both the material and immaterial context of the site in which it is situated. The material context is the physical site, and also buildings, nature, roads, squares etc. that you encounter there. The immaterial context is the various ways in which the site is used and understood, including the history of the site; the representation of the site in plans and media; the everyday practices and social relations that is produced in and through the site; the imagined future visions and hopes the site accommodates; and the experiences and forms of belonging that the site accommodates. The material and immaterial context is mapped through a site analysis that might include some or all of the following tools:

1. COLLABORATIONS

become a participant in the site and situation. You are not the experts, but you learn together with your partners and the people you are working with. The Drama Labs depend on many different knowledges: artistic knowledge (that of artists and theatre makers), local knowledge (that of the municipality and civil society), built environment knowledge (that of planners and architects) and outsider knowledge (that of a researcher without a stake in the site and that is able to look at it with 'fresh eyes').

2. INTERVIEWS

create narratives that enable you to engage with the complexity of the site. This can be done through interviews with local stakeholders, as well as through spontaneous chats in the street with people you would not have talked to otherwise. This is not simply about adding more information about the site, but it is about adding more complexity, more meaning, more voices and perspectives.



3. SPATIAL OBSERVATIONS

create embodied understandings of the site: what it is to experience the site daily. This involves observing the everyday, embodied practices of individuals in and around the site, and what activities take place there throughout the day/night.

4. MEETING OBSERVATIONS

use dramaturgical analysis to observe and analyse stakeholder and citizen meetings. By using theatre-associated concepts, such as staging, props, rituals and performances, to describe and analyse these moments, you can execute an analysis of these meetings and uncover dynamics and interactions which are otherwise hard to capture, for example how the meeting is staged to structure the interaction and how protagonists and antagonists might act on this stage.

5. PUBLIC INTERVENTION

intervene in the site through a small performance or a happening. This enables you to explore specific aspects and qualities of the site and test how people might respond. The intervention might also help you reach out to everyday users of the site that you might not have reached otherwise, generating interest in, and helping recruiting participants for, the Drama Labs.

6. CONTENT ANALYSIS

explore narratives, representations and sentiments about the site in the media and on the Internet, including social media. This helps you examine how the site is perceived in the public domain; how it is constructed and what controversies it provokes, and what actors it engages in doing so.



Tools for developing content

It is key that the content of the Drama Lab is not decided in advance (i.e. before the site analysis) but that it is developed in situ and in ways that allow for openness, flexibility, and responsiveness to the emerging understanding of what is going on, what specific goals the Drama Lab might feed into and requests from local stakeholders. This is not a linear process that leads directly from problem to solution, but an explorative process that is open to the surprises that arise in the midst of collaboration. This explorative process is ensured through some or all of the following tools:

1. PLOT

decide on the main event(s) that the Drama Lab will revolve around. Use the site analysis to ask: What matters to people concerning this site? What lines of differences and tension come into play here? What values and interests clash? These questions link with questions of whether a specific building should be preserved or demolished as part of the urban transformation; or about a battle between different future visions for the development of ecologically and culturally valuable places; or of who actually decides what should happen to a place in the future.

2. FRAMEWORK

develop a format that will engage participants. Use the plot to ask: How to best engage people in this matter of concern? This could be through a format of, for instance, a performative conversation, a fictional scenario, an audio walk, a public intervention or a role-play.



3. REHEARSAL

rehearse the Drama Lab by testing the framework and plot on different participants. If you do not have 'test-participants', rehearse it with colleagues that take on different participants roles, such as the sceptic, the enthusiast, the insecure etc. Use the rehearsals to ask: Is this the correct format to engage participants in the plot? How might different participants react to the framework? Will they understand how to interact with the framework and with each other within it? Is it serious enough for the participants to understand its relevance for the site, and is it (at the same time) playful enough to enable them to experiment with new perspectives? Do not be afraid to change or adapt the plot or framework during and after the rehearsals. It is important to be flexible in this process.

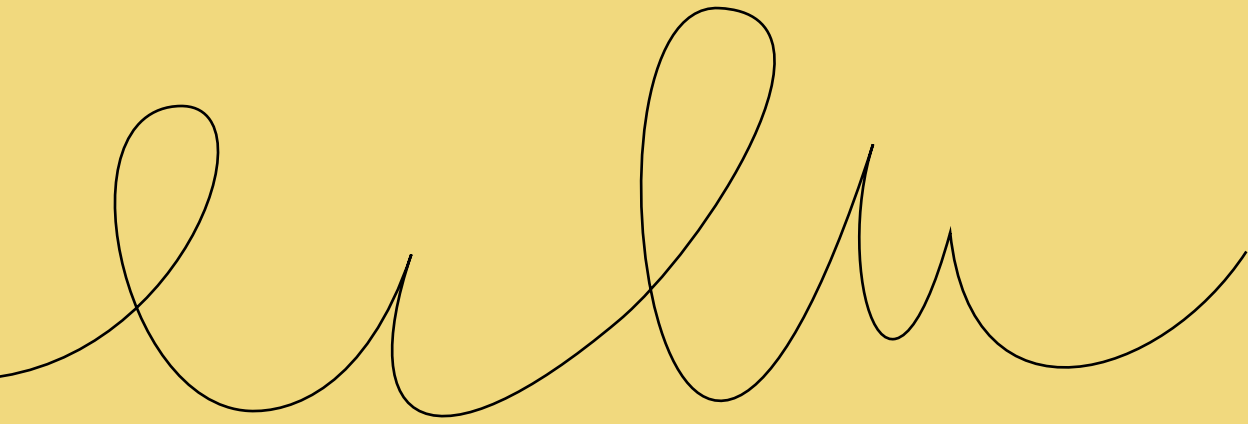
4. SCENOGRAPHY

create an artistic setting that visually signals that this is not a traditional participatory meeting. Use, for example, lighting, props, costumes and set to create an atmosphere and mood that support the plot. This could be by presenting the map of the site as a sewn textile covering the whole floor of the event locality. Or by creating a scene as in political debates, assigning participants props or attributes of the characters they play.

5. GUIDES/ACTORS

decide whether you need guides or actors to organise an engaging event (see more on this topic below). If your framework involves a workshop, educational or training elements it is worth having people with experience within education and pedagogy in your drama team.

Planning Practicalities



The planning phase of the Drama Labs will take significant work. You will have to start several months before you want to execute it. The work itself could take up to 3 months work for one person, preferably in partnership with a theatre maker. First, start with the situation or environment you want to tackle. Dedicate 1 month for the site analysis and 1 month for the content development and rehearsals. In this period, it is important to also set aside sufficient time and resources for considering recruitment of participants, location-scouting, guide-training, and so on. In all these processes, do not act alone, but collaborate with other stakeholders who can be helpful in the implementation of your Drama Lab (i.e. other city departments, theatre partners, external consultants).



Recruitment

The Drama Lab is nothing without participants. The number of participants depends on the format of the Drama Lab, it could be two or it could be 40. Only when the plot and framework for the Drama Lab have been determined can you start recruiting. Make sure to set aside sufficient time and resources for this task.

5 TIPS FOR RECRUITMENT:

- 1 Be aware of what is being communicated. It is important that those 'selling' the Drama Lab to potential participants have experienced or have received a thorough introduction to what it is about.
- 2 Use the same material and visual expression in all communication channels (e-mail, social media, newspapers). Posting flyers in the mailboxes of residents living in the area to be discussed in the Drama Lab has also proven to be efficient.
- 3 Contact potential participants personally and customise the invitation so that it is clear why it is important that this particular (group of) participant(s) joins. This is particularly the case for invitations to politicians and other officials, among others.
- 4 Carefully consider who is communicating. It is an advantage if the communicators are people whom the recipient trusts.
- 5 Be careful using words associated with art and theatre methodologies. People might find theatre and art as a methodology in combination with participant involvement rather intimidating (they don't want to be on stage) and frivolous (what has that got to do with the planning process?). There are many suitable synonyms you can use in your communication and establishment work that describe what the Drama Lab is about without using theatre vocabulary, such as 'innovative and playful setting', 'a different type of conversation', 'a new format of participation', etc.

Location scouting

The place in which the Drama Lab plays out is of key importance. The choice of location depends on the specific differences in interests, values and perspectives; the possible conflict, situation and target group; the chosen framework and artistic setting; available resources or time of year, and so on. Events can be organised in a public space, the local school, an office building, a parking space, a sports hall or a theatre venue. It is recommended that the location somehow relates to the issue at hand. This could be done locating the Drama Lab in a venue physically close to the development site, or in a theatre in which scenography is used to evoke the characteristics of the place. It is also important that the location is easy to reach and accessible to groups with limited mobility.

Guides

It is recommended that the Drama Lab is facilitated by one or more guides that have experience with participatory theatre. Ideally there will be 1 guide per 5 participants to ensure a good conversation flow. The guide is the bearing structure of the Drama Lab and is responsible for guiding the participants through the plot and framework. Because Drama Labs have a high degree of interactivity it is also the guides' responsibility to make sure the participants feel safe and welcome, so that they want to participate and share. In addition, the guides must make sure that the conversations in the Drama Lab are relevant and stay on topic.



5 TIPS FOR THE GUIDES:

- 1 Create a safe and welcoming environment in which no-one is put in the spot-light, unless they want to. At the same time, do not give too much attention to those who demand it, make sure everyone (who wants to) is heard and seen.
- 2 Set clear time frames and rules and adhere to them throughout. Always make sure that the participants know what they are/should be doing in the moment, and prepare them for what will happen next.
- 3 Avoid taking on the role of the expert. Avoid over-education and infantilizing rhetoric. Do not put yourself above the participants, but make sure that you see eye-to-eye with them.
- 4 Be curious about the participants' perspectives and ideas and be flexible enough to test them out. Try not to have a predetermined idea of how the Drama Lab should play out. The magic often happens when you go off-script and use the suggestions and directions set out by the participants to guide the actions.
- 5 Set boundaries. If someone doesn't want to participate, address it and ask if they want to join the ongoing activity. If not, they are free to leave.

Budget allocation

The resources you need depend on the scope of the project concerning, for example, the duration of the Drama Labs and its activities. It is important to reserve adequate resources for developing and creating the artistic setting, including for guides, scenography and props, and to properly compensate contributing artists for their time and expertise. There also needs to be a budget set aside for food and drinks for participants to acknowledge and 'reward' the time they spend in taking part. Finally, make sure to reserve adequate resources up front for marketing and promotional materials, recruitment, and evaluation.



CONTRATAK!

11, 12, 13, 14 lipca 2023,
g. 19:00—21:00

Key tools for executing the Drama Lab



Tools for shifting perspectives

It is key that the Drama Lab encourages participants to explore new perspectives. These could be the perspectives of participants with differing roles, views and opinions; marginalised and more personal perspectives concerning the site; perspectives that belong to unexpected actors and stakeholders such as 'a future generation', 'nature on the site' and so on. To enable shifts in perspectives, you could use some or all of the following tools:

EMBODIMENT

enable participants to 'act out' the plot by engaging their bodies beyond simply talking and listening. This could be done by having a conversation without words focussing on non-verbal communication; positioning bodies differently in the space, for example by lying down while talking or walking backwards across a public square; testing the implications of an argument physically, for example by actually demolishing or repairing an object when discussing issues of demolition or preservation.

STORYTELLING

tell fictional stories or share personal stories about the site. Storytelling enables interests, differences and visions to be discussed and explored not only rationally but also emotionally (addressing for instance, hope, anxiety or anger). Storytelling also enables participants to represent their individual selves rather than being representatives of specific groups (i.e. 'the immigrants' or 'the elderly') or formal roles ('the planner' or 'the developer'). Storytelling can be fostered through 'conversation prompts' such as objects, maps or simply questions that ask: what is the story of this site? What is your relationship to this site? What is your favourite place here? How did this place become important to you?

ROLE-PLAY

give the participants the possibility to try on roles and perspectives that are not their own. This could be done by borrowing techniques from Live Action Role Play, where participants take on the roles of characters, each with their own goals, motivations, relationships, and attributes, and act these out through improvisation and joint storytelling with other participants in an interactive game (i.e. the participants decide intuitively how a developer would behave during a public discussion about a site s/he wants to invest in); or have an actor play 'the child from the future' to translate 'the effects of our decisions on future generations' to a physical, embodied presence in the room, which enables another dimension of empathy or connection; or give voice to the site itself (i.e. through physical objects such as the buildings, cars, trees etc.).

SOCIOMETRY

explore interpersonal connection and group dynamics. Have the participants answer a series of 'yes' and 'no' questions by positioning themselves on opposite sides of the room or in a line. This way, the participants can make their own perspectives visible to each other and in so doing disclose their similarities and differences.

PROPS/COSTUMES

help participants get into their role and bring symbols into play. Taking on a prop or costume can be seen as a ritual to enter into a new character and mark to the rest of the group that you are not yourself. This could for example entail putting on a silk scarf to mark your role as an enthusiast for preserving buildings, or putting on working gloves to become a demolition enthusiast. Props and costumes can symbolise and stand for ideas and concepts, like a dove is a symbol of peace. Props and costumes can also be envisioned and created together with/by participants, as a way of engaging in conversations and letting them decide for themselves which character they want to embody.



SHAKING OFF ROLES

encourage participants to symbolically shed their roles. This could be done by shouting their real name out loud or removing the props/costumes they have used to mark their roles. This gesture helps participants transition from fictional reality to the real world.

SOUND/SILENCE

use music that suits a specific scene or activity to create a certain atmosphere. Similarly, silence, the being together of a group in contemplation, can create a reflective atmosphere that is supportive of dialogue.



Tools for exploring conflict

It is key that the Drama Lab enables conflicts and tensions to be freely expressed and explored. While a specific conflict concerning the site might not be readily visible or explicitly articulated, it is worth keeping in mind that any dream, vision, decision or plan is always formed against competing dreams, visions, decisions or plans. By making space for conflicting perspectives in this regard, the Drama Lab accommodates the social complexity of urban transformation projects. To enable participants to explore conflicts and tensions, you could use some or all of the following tools:



PLAY

emphasise the role of play throughout the Drama Lab. The focus on play lowers the stake of the Drama Labs and gives permission to act on other possibilities for being. Play can be promoted through humour and fun, for example by 'warming up' the participants through small games such as standing in a circle, asking participants who (for instance) have a cat / like to sing / own an instrument / ... to step forward. This is a non-threatening manner to break the ice and find some (trivial, but perhaps funny or interesting) points of connection within the group.

PUBLIC CELEBRATION/RITUAL

together with participants, create a ritual in which you engage in a celebration of a particular place through a sequence of events, including words, gestures, actions, revered local objects and/or ritual elements/materials made by participants.

WAR OF POSITIONS

invite the participants to pick sides and explore extreme polarisation. This could be done by introducing a topic relevant to the site in a polarising fashion from the start, fuelling a discussion where extreme positions and arguments can be explored. For example, a Drama Lab can take as its starting point the extreme position of preserving everything on the site at any cost and demolishing everything on the site at any cost. Physically, positions can be taken by drawing a line or a thread on the floor and asking those who agree with a statement offered to step over the line.

ECHO CHAMBERS

build an 'us vs. them' group identity. This could be done by dividing participants into two groups that represent opposing positions. Lead the groups to separate locations (chambers) in which they are invited to explore and build the identity of their group and position. This group identity could be further solidified by making assumptions and claims about the other group.



ORAL BATTLE

explore differences face to face. This could be done by inviting two opposing groups to a conversational battle in which they stand in two lines opposite each other. Here, they point out differences between them in the form of statements that start with 'we' or 'you' ('We are thinking about the environment', 'You are profiteers'). The group is only allowed to speak on behalf of their group and the perspective they represent. Participants should not answer the statements of the opponent but take them in and let them go.

FORUM THEATER

broaden the community's reflection on important events and issues. This could be done by actors staging a scene depicting, for example, the escalation of a latent conflict. Here, participants are *spect-actors*, playing the dual role of critical spectators, as well as participants who can step on stage at any time and change the course of events.

ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND DEBATE

turn into politicians for a while. This could be achieved by organising a fictional election campaign, combined with political candidates' debates for the mayoral position. Create a proper space for the debate, give participants time to prepare their postulates and promises and gather support. During the debate, make sure the speech culture is respectful and that there are equal speech opportunities for all candidates, while leading the debate to explore the conflicting issues that are relevant in the local context.

BLIND CONVERSATIONS

facilitate conversations whereby the participants do not know who they are talking to. This could be done by making a 'confession booth' in which participants will sit and talk to each other from each side of a wall. This could facilitate conversations that might otherwise be difficult to have, or enable participants to express opinions that might not be quite in line with the professional role people have in their daily lives. Throughout these conversations, you could let the participants follow a certain script, e.g. where it is stated that they cannot ask about the other person's name or job, etc.

TRUST TEST

ask participants to collaborate on a task in a manner that puts one of the participants in a power position and the other in a vulnerable position. Two participants can work together to hit a nail into a piece of wood – one using the hammer, the other one holding the nail. This requires a significant amount of trust and allows participants to physically experience this.

COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

have participants work together in a physical activity or effort, which can only be performed if everyone works together. This can for example be collectively carrying a heavy object such as a stone. Make sure that there are enough participants to do this so it is not burdensome for anyone.

Tools for reflection

At the end of the Drama Lab, make sure to set aside sufficient time for the participants to collectively reflect on what they experienced. Avoid that this becomes just an educational reflection ('So, what did we learn?') or a direct feedback on the concept ('You did a great job in participating in this event!'). Instead, the participants should share personal reflections such as how the activities affected them and possibly how it contributed to new perspectives on each other and the area. Avoid that the conversation becomes too intellectual or business-like (what is actually going to happen in the area), try instead to keep it on a personal and reflective level. To enable this form of reflection, you could use some or all of the following tools:

SITTING WITH BACKS TOWARD EACH OTHER

create a low-threshold setting for expressing thoughts and perspectives. The participants take a chair and form a circle with their backs towards each other and their faces facing outwards. The participants are therefore not looking at each other but looking in different directions around the room. This makes it easier and more 'safe' to share reflections as participants are not put in the spotlight when talking to the group.

SHARED MEAL

create an informal and everyday meeting place that breaks with the artificial setting of the Drama Lab. The meal has no overarching agenda or form and has an open ending. It enables participants to talk to their fellow participants about whatever might concern or interest them.





Implementation practicalities



The implementation of the Drama Labs depends largely on its context and set up. Nevertheless, for all Drama Labs, it is key to consider issues concerning duration, ethics, documentation, catering and evaluation.

Duration

There can be a great variation in how long each Drama Lab and the series of Drama Labs should last. Each event could last anything between 30 minutes or three hours or longer. And the series of Drama Labs can unfold within a week or during the course of several months. Think carefully in advance when the Drama Lab will be scheduled and whether there is any overlap with local events.

Ethics

It is important to consider extensively the ethical implications of your Drama Lab. Some questions to consider are: How to make sure that you do not exploit participants and that they are able to take part on their own terms? How to not mislead participants concerning the purpose and use of the Drama Lab in the planning process? Working with consent forms may be one way to deal with this: prior to the event, you ask each participant to sign a form in which the goal and set up of the drama lab is made clear.

However, be aware that consent forms can also be intimidating for participants and might make them question your goals. If you are trying to establish a playful atmosphere and suddenly confront the participants with an official document they have to sign, this might create confusion and insecurity. If you use a consent form, make sure that it supports, rather than compromises, the confidence of the participants and the atmosphere you want to create. This could be done by making the consent form part of a game or warm-up exercise.



Documentation

Make sure you have various ways to document the Drama Labs. This can be done through audio or video recordings or through observations by the team members. Remember to ask participants for their permission to record the event. This could, for example, be done in the consent forms. If you take pictures, ask participants for permission to use them afterwards. Participants who do not want to appear in pictures can be given a sticker they wear so the photographer can avoid photographing them.

Catering

Offer the participants food as a token of gratitude for their choice to spend their time with you. Starting the Drama Lab with offering a snack or a drink might loosen the atmosphere and be a nice welcome. To serve drinks and snacks during the Drama Lab

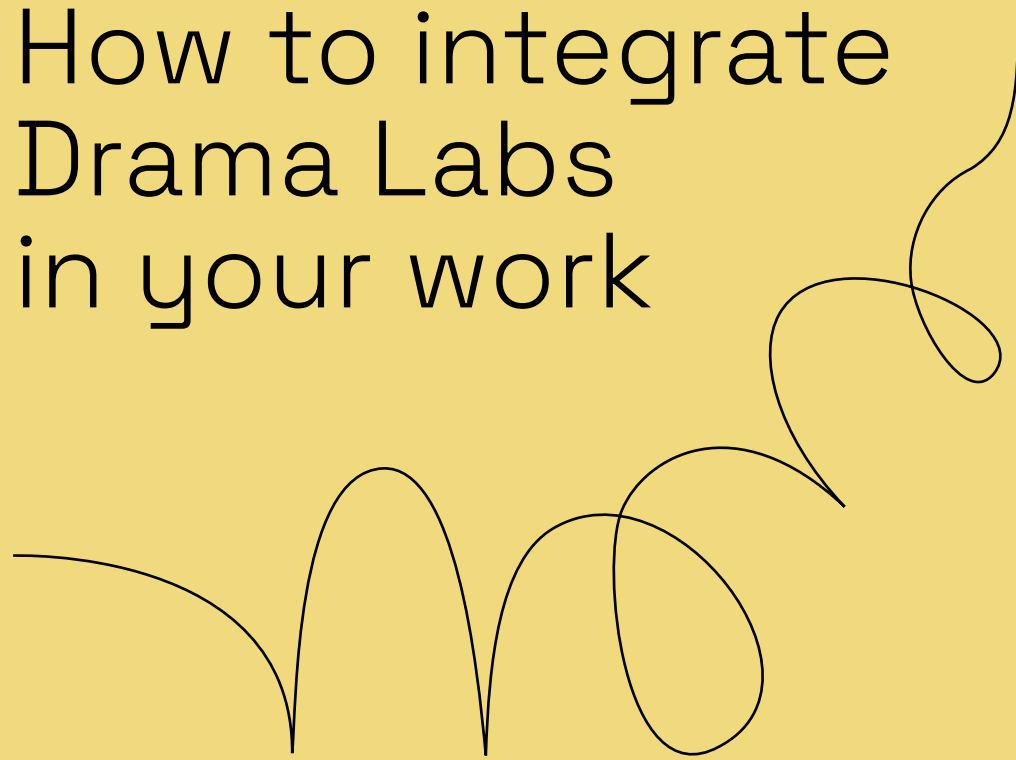


might also help with the energy level of the participants. As mentioned above, a shared meal at the end of the Drama Lab is key to its success. 'Commensality' – the act of sharing a meal with others – is a fundamental aspect of human interaction. Eating together helps build relationships and create community by providing participants with the opportunity to connect and share experiences in a personal setting.

Evaluation

After each Drama Lab, sit down with the team organising/facilitating it and reflect on what happened. What worked? What didn't work? What should be changed next time you do it? Each Drama Lab is a process, not a product. Don't be afraid to constantly tweak and make changes to accommodate and address various potentials and challenges that you observe in practice.

How to integrate Drama Labs in your work



How to work with artists

Artistic expertise is required to develop the Drama Labs. Make sure to collaborate with people that have artistic expertise, for example in the performing arts, including scenography, dramaturgy and acting. As with any collaborative relation, it is important to create opportunities for dialogue and feedback throughout the project. Be mindful that this toolbox does not replace the experience and expertise an artist will bring to the project.

3 TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION WITH ARTISTS:

- 1 Make sure that the artists are included from the very beginning of the process and that they get properly integrated in the site and the planning process that the Drama Labs will be a part of. Professional artists might also have a busy agenda in which they need to look for the best moment to prepare and execute a Drama Lab.
- 2 Keep in mind that artists often work with explorative processes that are quite different from the more linear processes that often dominate planning processes. The value of such explorative processes is that they make room for improvisation and unexpected discoveries that easily are overlooked when the outcome of the process is decided beforehand.
- 3 Focus on time and trust: Give artists *time* to engage in explorative processes and build *trust* by understanding the value in different ways of doing things and acknowledging that you are all working towards a common goal.

How to anchor the Drama Lab in the work of the municipality

Anchoring the Drama Lab in the work of the municipality is key to the success of the Drama Lab. Strong anchorage will ensure ripple-off effects on other participatory processes as well as increased engagement in and enthusiasm for the development area among residents.

3 TIPS FOR ENSURING STRONG ANCHORAGE:

- 1 Find someone in the municipal organisation who is passionate about participation and who can be the leading figure for promoting the Drama Lab as a new, innovative and exciting participatory method. Ideally, they play the role of ambassador for the Drama Lab in their organisation. It is also important that there is interest in the Drama Lab from others in the organisation who might decide on municipal support for it.
- 2 Identify the network of stakeholders relevant to the Drama Lab and recruit Drama Lab ambassadors: Arrange a series of meeting points in relation to a Drama Lab, preferably 6 – 12 months before the actual lab takes place. Start by introducing the Drama Lab to the network; associations, municipal employees, politicians and developers. Involve the actor network in the development of the Drama Lab, for example by inviting them to test different versions of the Drama Lab before the actual implementation.
- 3 Establish good dialogue with the potential developer(s) of the site and make sure they participate in the Drama Lab. The developer plays a key role in ensuring the integration of the Drama Lab in the planning process. Be aware that developers may be sceptical of the Drama Lab concept, so set aside plenty of time to involve them from the start so they understand the relevance of their participation. It is worth emphasising that developers might participate in the Drama Lab as interested individuals, and not necessarily representing 'the developer' as such.



Learning from practice



Four 'types' of Drama Labs

The Drama Labs have been developed and implemented in Drammen (Norway), Gdynia (Poland), Tilburg (the Netherlands) and Genk (Belgium). These were four very different Drama Labs, responding to very different sites and urban development processes, and developing very different tools for addressing conflict within these sites. In the following we present these four different Drama Labs, not as blueprints for what a Drama Lab is or should be, but as inspirations for how the tools presented in this toolkit can be put into practice in different ways and contexts.

Bragernes ByLab – Drama Labs in Drammen (Norway)

The Norwegian edition of the Drama Lab was called Bragernes ByLab (Bragernes CityLab). Bragernes was the name of the development site in Drammen that the Drama Lab responded to. The site was facing a large-scale urban transformation process as the city hospital that was located there was to be moved to another part of the city. During **the site analysis** the Drama Lab team realised that a key point of conflict was the question of what would happen to the hospital building once it was no longer a hospital. Should the building be demolished or preserved, and what would be the consequences for the surrounding area? This question became **the plot** around which the Drama Lab revolved. The aim was not to provide an answer to the question, but to explore the two opposing positions of wanting to demolish or preserve the hospital building. **The framework** for exploring these two positions was a 'performative conversation' that took place at a Junior High School that was located right next to the hospital site. **The scenography** used to signal an artistic setting was a large textile that covered the floor of the entire room with a map of the site sewn onto it. The map worked as a conversation prompt, initiating a **storytelling** session in which the participants were invited by **the guides** to share personal stories about their relations to the area. The participants were equipped with a **prop** consisting of a porcelain cup that they placed on their favourite location at the site. The tool of **role-play** was introduced

through an audio walk around the site. Here, the participants were listening to the voices of the site sharing their thoughts about the fate of the hospital building and the area in general (i.e. the Old Power Station advocating for preserving the hospital building as cultural heritage; The Tourist Sign wanting to demolish the building block in favour 'starchitecture' with branding potential and so on). After the audio walk, the participants were engaged in a **war of positions** as they were asked to pick sides by taking on roles as either preservation enthusiasts or demolition enthusiasts. They were led down in the school basement to each of their **echo chambers** where they built a group identity. This was done, firstly, by receiving a **prop** to mark their role: working gloves for the demolition enthusiasts and silk scarves to the preservation enthusiasts. Secondly, through **embodiment**: the demolition enthusiasts smashed the porcelain cups that were used to mark participants' favourite places, and the preservation enthusiasts repaired broken porcelain cups through the Japanese art of 'kintsugi'. In the final part, the two groups met face to face in an **oral battle** inspired by techniques developed by the performance group *Building Conversation*. In the battle, participants stood opposite each other and addressed the differences between the two groups: 'you [preservation enthusiasts] are stuck in the past, we [demolition enthusiasts] are future oriented!'; 'you [demolition enthusiasts] do not care about the environment, we [preservation enthusiasts] take care of what we have'. The participants marked the end of the battle by removing their gloves and giving their opponents a high-five. Then, they sat in a circle with their backs towards each other **reflecting** on the experience from their own personal perspectives. Finally, they met for a meal in the school yard, where more informal conversations were had.







ContraTAK! – Drama Labs in Gdynia (Poland)

The Polish edition of the Drama Lab took place in Gdynia and was called ContraTAK!. 'ContraTAK!' is a play on words in Polish – it is at the same time a reference to the project's name CONTRA, which means to counterattack and therefore an active confrontation as well as to verbalised agreement and acceptance (in Polish 'tak' means 'yes'). In **location-scouting**, we worked closely with city representatives which led to the selection of the Redłowska Glade, a green public space, as a case for our Drama Lab. This is one of the most popular recreation and leisure areas in Gdynia – an essential part of the city's identity and collective memory. The Redłowska Glade has been at the centre of one of the city's most notorious conflicts in recent history. The conflict concerned its future development – can parts of it be sold? How could commercial development affect its public character? And how should participatory processes be carried out to truly involve residents in urban planning? We explored the opposing sides of the dispute by conducting in-depth **content analysis** and **interviews** with key stakeholders. Our study showed that the gist of the conflict was the communication between the city authorities and activists, as well as residents' (lack of) access to decision-making. This conflict of communication became the **plot** which ContraTAK! revolved around. The plot played out in a **framework** consisting of an interactive, paratheatrical and fictional **role-play** with elements of **LARP** (Live Action Role Playing), **Forum Theater**, and a simulation game. The role-play introduced plans to develop Redłowska Glade for entertainment purposes, involving the clashes and misunderstandings of various interest groups trying to achieve their goals. The story was set in the history of the place in the 1990s in order to avoid directly referencing or reproducing current conflicts and tensions. The aim was to explore how to break down communication barriers that impeded dialogue between stakeholders. The Drama Lab was held at the local Gdynia Główna Theater, whose team was responsible for its organisation. This enabled the use of theatrical resources to set an attractive and engaging **scenography**, depicting three spaces: the local neighbourhood, the city hall and a 'neutral' space. In each space, different relationships between participants were established and slightly different events played out. In the first part, **the guides/actors** divided the participants into three groups: residents, artists and officials, and introduced them to 'their' space and its history. During the **storytelling** session, the participants were encouraged to share the beliefs and attributes of their roles,





use **props** (like gardening equipment for plant-loving characters, or a photo album, for those feeling nostalgic about the place) and perform assigned activities (a neighbourhood after-work gathering at a local square, or artists' techno party). The goal of such **embodiment** was to immerse participants in the game world. In the second part, a **war of positions** was introduced over the development of a fictional neighbourhood, which led to a change in the relationship between groups of participants. To agree on plans for the development of their area and the conflicting demands of different parties, participants had to negotiate and weigh positive and negative emotions, successes and failures. This led to the next part, which was the **election campaign and debate** before a fictional mayoral election that would decide on the future of their neighbourhood. After exciting discussions and the culmination of the game, the participants were invited to symbolically **shake off their roles** and move from the fictional reality to the real world. Finally, the participants sat together, **reflecting** on their impressions, experiences and lessons learned during the game. The conversations continued in a less formal atmosphere over a **shared meal**, which concluded the Drama Lab.



Drama Labs in Tilburg (the Netherlands)

The Tilburg Drama Lab focused on the redevelopment of an area in Tilburg North, located between a residential area and the highway surrounding Tilburg: 'Stadsrand Noord'. The adjoining neighbourhoods, Stokhasselt, Heijkamp and Quirijn-Stok, face socio economic issues and are a national focus area related to criminal undermining. At the outset of **the site analysis**, it was clear that Tilburg municipality had many plans for the area: there was to be a large water storage facility that can collect water from the inner city during heavy rainfall; the electricity supply was to be doubled in capacity; the area was also to be given a recreational function for local residents; and a 'low-incentive' housing facility was to be established. There were also different resident initiatives with plans for the area, including sustainable agriculture and a neighbourhood meeting place. During **interviews** with concerned officials and local stakeholders, and **meeting observations** of municipal hearings, some emotional sentiments quickly became apparent: many residents expressed a feeling of being 'at the bottom' of the municipality's priority list, and there was a sentiment 'that nothing would ever come of all those plans anyway'. At the same time, the plans for the Stadsrand seemed very important for, among other things, the climate adaptation policy of the city of Tilburg. Navigating these many interests and stakeholders was the main challenge, **the plot** around which the Drama Lab evolved. As there were no clearly opposing stakeholders with divergent interest and main conflict, the team decided that **the framework** for the Drama Lab should consist of physical installations and interactive activities. These led to a series of **embodied experiences** that were designed to surface undercurrents. The installations included **props** and **scenography**, which supported the interactive activities meant to make the participants collectively experience and reflect on topics like trust, equality and value in planning. As a first activity the participants knotted a thread along a timeline made of a row of nails on a wooden plank, each representing one year, to show the length of their lives up until the present. The last participant to knot a thread was the 'child of the future', a **role played** by one of the members of the research team. She knotted a thread way beyond where others had ended (the present). Another activity included a tree chunk, hammer and nail where one



person had to hold the nail, whilst the other was slamming the hammer into the tree chunk. This **trust test** put the person with the hammer in a power position and the person with the nail in a vulnerable position, demonstrating how executing future plans disproportionately affects people. The final installation included objects that **symbolised** the manyfold plans for the area and asked every participant to defend 'their' plan and find a place for it on a large-scale map of the site. This activity helped the group of participants to see the amount of plans in play and imagine the complexity it produces. The Drama Lab also played with **silence** and **sound**. It included music contributing to the atmosphere of each installation, and as a way of commenting on and dramatising the experiences. For example, during an activity where the participants had to prevent their miniature houses from flooding, a Bach cello suite was played to increase the dramatic and tragic effect of the experience. At another moment, several minutes were spent in silent reflection with all participants, which allowed participants to think of past experiences relevant to the dialogues generated in the Drama Lab. Like in the other Drama Labs, conversations continued in a less formal manner over a **shared meal**, bringing the Drama Lab to a close. In total, three Drama Labs (one of which was a rehearsal) took place.



Drama Labs in Genk (Belgium)

The Belgian edition of the Drama Labs took place in the city of Genk and played into the redevelopment of a local valley area suffering from flooding and pollution. During the **site analysis** it became apparent that many residents were not aware of, or did not engage with the plans to redevelop the area. This was surprising as interventions regarding water management are much needed and there were concerns regarding too much human interference in the natural environment of the valley. The **interviews** also revealed that several actors felt there was too much focus on individual needs rather than collective responsibilities; local residents, for example, were opposed to taking certain measures on their private property that would benefit the greater community, and policymakers failed to sufficiently explain why certain measures were needed. This dichotomy between the collective and individual eventually became the central **plot** of the Drama Labs. The **framework** for engaging participants in the plot had three phases. The first phase consisted of a **public intervention** in which an **actor** travelled around the valley with a tiny house on wheels. The house served both as **scenography** and as a **prop** to prompt curiosity, engagement and conversations with residents and passersby. These conversations revolved around **storytelling** in which the actor explained that because of climate change, she had to live in this tiny house. The aim of this phase was to make a connection between the transformation of the valley and the individual lives of its residents through the **embodiment** of a certain, possible collective future. In the second phase, the tiny house was transformed into a **confession booth** that hosted **blind conversations** between various stakeholders. The aim was to offer a space for conversations that are otherwise difficult to have because of the real life roles/positions of the stakeholders. **Guides** made sure that the conversation partners could not see each other, and during the conversation, the partners took turns asking each other questions about their concerns, dreams and hopes around climate change. The third phase revolved around a **celebration** of the valley through a **public ritual**. The aim was for the ritual to be an 'outlet' of the emotions that surfaced in the previous phases. The ritual encompassed a **procession** in honour of the valley and in memory of several parking spaces that will disappear in order to make space for more water. The procession began by removing





a heavy stone from a parking space and placing it on a carrier. Participants were invited to help carry the stone, experiencing for themselves the heavy sacrifice that is made when it comes to urban transformations and to **embody** the duality between the individual and the **collaborative effort** needed for these transformations. The tiny house was also pulled forward together by actors as well as participants through the streets of the neighbourhood. The procession stopped at a few special places in the valley to reflect on the changing relationships between humans, nature and water. At the end, the stone was lowered into the creek, after which actors recited quotes that had surfaced from phases 1 and 2, encompassing the (sometimes difficult) relationship between humans, nature and water. Participants were also invited to silently express a wish for how we can transform our relationship with water. The ritual concluded with a **shared meal** on a bridge over the creek, during which participants were invited to further **reflect** on their experiences in the Drama Lab.



Key learnings

- Do not underestimate the role of the guides! They are key to make the participants feel at ease, to initiate conversations and to ensure a smooth running of the events.
- Refer to other professionals/experts in order to give context/importance to what is introduced in the Drama Lab. For example: 'Donald Winnicott is a well-known psychoanalyst and paediatrician, and he writes about the importance of play for our development as human beings. As children, we use play to make sense of our surroundings, to try out different situations and roles, and to get to know ourselves better in the process. Play, Winnicott says, is also a necessary process in developing the capacity to manage emotions and change. Today, we will use play in the same way: we will take on roles and positions that are not our own, and practice seeing the changes to the area from different perspectives.'
- Use rehearsals to think about the different twists and turns the Drama Lab might create in encounters with participants, and create good strategies to navigate these twists and turns.
- Create frameworks that provide sufficient room for manoeuvre. Do not force participants into a framework, simply introduce it and provide clear guidelines for how to navigate within it. The participants themselves decide how they want to proceed and perform.
- Encourage participants to follow their intuition and let their feelings out. Keep an eye on the atmosphere during events to make sure things don't get too intense. It is desirable for participants to push their boundaries and step out of their comfort zone, but make sure they feel safe both physically and mentally. And always provide an option for participants to withdraw or drop out.

- A key value of Drama Lab is to promote open interaction between people representing different social groups and worldviews. When recruiting, aim for a mix of ages, genders, and backgrounds. Diversity is crucial – it allows participants to see things from new angles, appreciate different viewpoints and better understand other social positions and roles.
- After the final scene of the programme, Drama Lab should not conclude too fast! Keep the conversation going and encourage participants to share their experiences. In our events, shared meals have worked well for achieving this.
- To avoid clashes with holidays or elections, it's best to plan your Drama Lab dates carefully and in advance. Be mindful of local or national elections, as they can create tension and strain among participants or precarious professional conditions.
- If you are planning multiple events for your Drama Labs, consider scheduling sufficient time in between each Drama Lab to evaluate, make enhancements, and allow for word-of-mouth marketing.

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Toolboxes for different Drama Labs

NORWAY

→ Bragernes ByLab Drama Labs in Drammen



POLAND

→ ContraTAK! Drama Labs in Gdynia



THE NETHERLANDS

→ Drama Labs in Tilburg



BELGIUM

→ Drama Labs in Genk



