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# Drama Lab Toolbox

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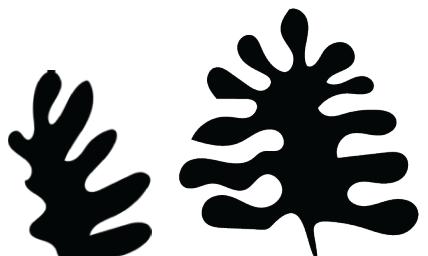
Webpage:  
[www.conflictsintransformation.eu](http://www.conflictsintransformation.eu)



**This experience made  
me engaged in an issue  
I haven't engaged with  
before. I will definitely  
keep an eye on the  
development of this area  
to see what happens next.**

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(Participant, Male resident in his 50s)





# Drama Lab



**Drama Lab** is a meeting place between developers, municipal workers, politicians and residents who live in and around an area that is to be transformed.

**Drama Lab** uses artistic methods to create a new form of participation where formal argumentation is replaced by playful dialogue.

**Drama Lab** stages and constructs environments, situations and roles so that participants can see a case or place from multiple perspectives.

**Drama Lab** provides space for emotions and conflict, and investigates how disagreements can be a strength - rather than a threat - in urban development.

**Drama Lab** emphasises that dialogue has an intrinsic value - even if it does not lead to a concrete result, proposal or input in the planning process.

**Drama Lab** allows participants to participate as themselves and not as representatives of a particular group, profession or office.

**Drama Lab** gives participants an experience and does not demand anything in return.

**Drama Lab** creates involvement and enthusiasm for the development area and the transformation process.

**Drama Lab** does not look for concrete solutions, but expands the room for manoeuvre in a transformation process.



**I felt that it was very safe to play together. That you get closer to strangers in this way was great!**

Participant (40 years)

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# 1. About Drama Lab

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Drama Lab is a participatory event consisting of a series of guided and performative conversations that concludes with a communal meal. With the help of theatre magic and staging, urban development is put into a tangible and playful setting that anyone over the age of 12 can participate in. Citizens, municipal employees, developers and politicians gather to explore different views on what should happen in and with an area that is to be developed and changed. Here, space is given to both agreement and disagreement, and we get to know each other and the area in new ways.

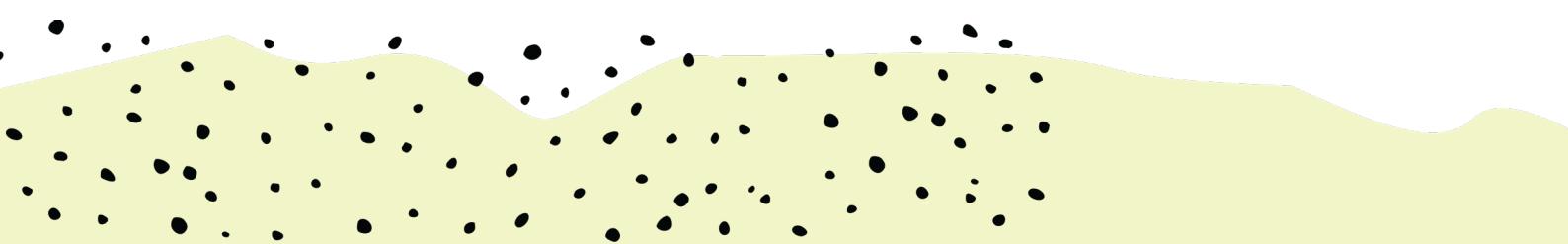
This toolbox has been developed together with Bragernes Drama Lab as a case study. We have used a specific case as a starting point to provide an understanding of what a Drama Lab might look like. However, each Drama Lab requires a customised design regarding the specific development area in which it will be carried out.

## 1.1 Background

Drama Lab has been developed as part of the European research project CONTRA - CONflict in TRAnsformations. CONTRA is based on a situation in many European cities, where many conflicts related to transformations of places and areas arise. We see a tendency for the debates associated with these transformations to become very polarised: people get stuck in entrenched positions because they feel they have a lot to lose, and the issue

often becomes very black and white: are you for or are you against? Are you with us or against us? As a counter-reaction, there is often a strong focus on creating consensus in urban and regional development. We focus on collaboration, participation, and that everyone should have a voice in matters that concern them. At the same time, little space is given to disagreements. These are often moved elsewhere in the process, or seen as irrelevant and of little substance. Disagreement doesn't leave room for people's feelings and engagement, and there is a risk that one therefore does not feel heard. CONTRA investigates how we can manage conflict in a more productive way. Here, it is not about just trying to avoid them, but about creating an arena where we can explore potential conflicts and find new ways to deal with them.

CONTRA's pilot project in Norway was called 'Bragernes Drama Lab' and was organised by OsloMet in collaboration with Drammen Municipality. The concept was developed with inspiration from Building Conversation ([buildingconversation.nl](http://buildingconversation.nl)), and developed by the performing artists Marthe Sofie Løkeland Eide, Ylva Owren, Heiki Riipinen, Andrea Vik and Cecilie Sachs Olsen in collaboration with master's students at the Department of Art, Design and Drama, OsloMet, and an international theatre team.



## 1.2 Why Drama Lab

*Why should municipalities use Drama Lab as a participation tool?*

Drama Lab helps municipalities to become pioneers in developing new approaches to and methods for participation.

Traditional participation processes are often solution-oriented. The goal is to create consensus on what should be done. Here, there is a tendency for citizens to only be given the opportunity to react to developments that have already been determined and correspondingly defined problems and solutions. They are, to a far lesser extent, able to set the premises for development by being allowed to decide how problems and solutions are defined and understood in the first place.

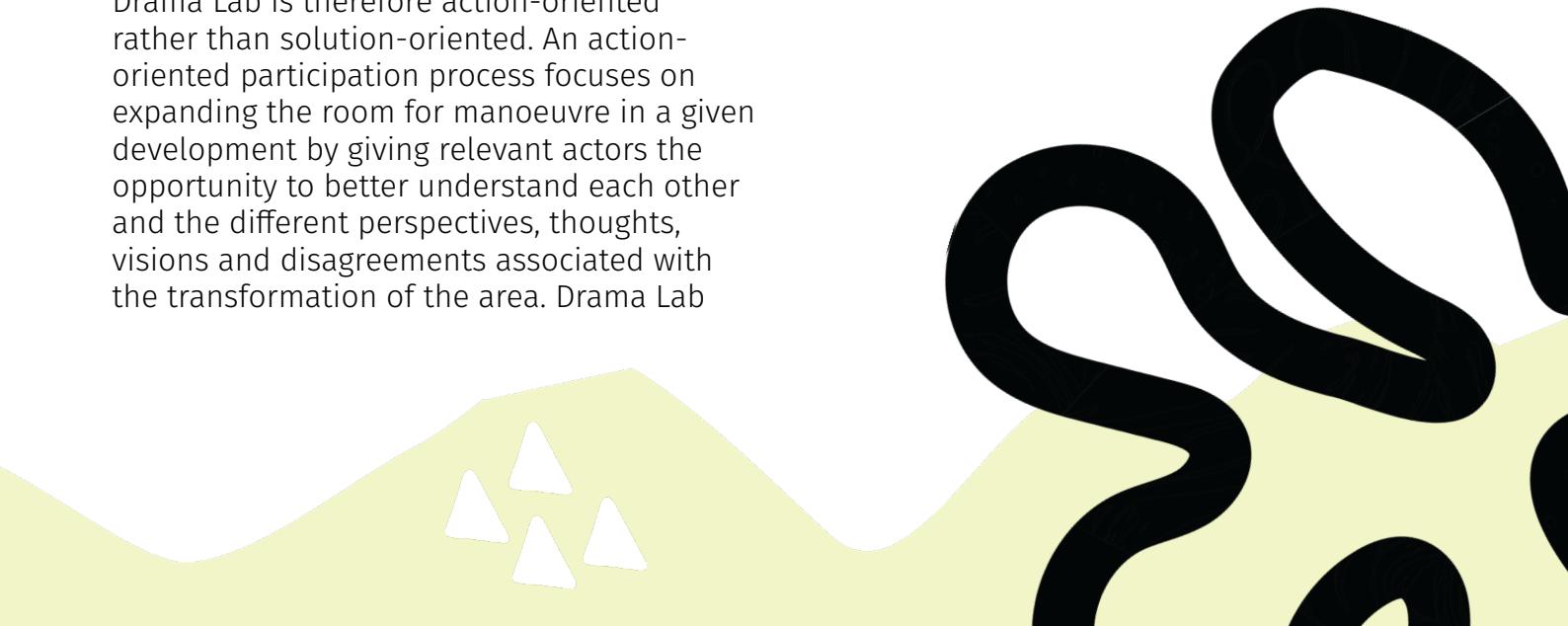
## 1.3 What can Drama Lab do

Drama Lab creates an arena for participation that operates on a previous level that is about broadening our definition and understanding of problems and solutions. Drama Lab is therefore action-oriented rather than solution-oriented. An action-oriented participation process focuses on expanding the room for manoeuvre in a given development by giving relevant actors the opportunity to better understand each other and the different perspectives, thoughts, visions and disagreements associated with the transformation of the area. Drama Lab

does this by training participants to navigate complexity rather than reduce complexity.

## 1.4 What do municipalities get

- Broad insight into potential lines of conflict that may be relevant in a given development
- New methods to better manage disagreement and conflict in transformation processes
- The opportunity to harvest the capacity that disagreement and conflict have in order to create involvement among actor networks in a given development
- An inclusive arena that can accommodate the whole person; objective arguments and statements, as well as dreams, fears and feelings
- A broader basis for action that creates greater understanding that there are different interests and perspectives in a planning process
- More creativity 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 methods.



## 2. Setting: Art as a premise

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Drama Lab uses methods and tools developed through artistic practice. This practice is often referred to as being socially engaged, dialogue-based, relational and participatory, where the goal is to facilitate an open and exploratory process that engages a wide range of community groups in a place or topic. What art can do here is to offer the participants a safe, different and playful arena that can bring people together across roles, age and class, and which stands in stark contrast to the traditional arenas of participation one usually finds in urban development.

Traditional participation processes often take place in what are called 'hot settings'. There is a lot at stake here, decisions must be made and people therefore feel they have a lot to lose. Often, one feels compelled to hold on to their position and not change their perspective for fear of appearing weak or frivolous. In such 'hot' settings, there is a tendency for certain voices to be heard, usually those who speak the loudest and who are best at articulating themselves through well-formulated and objective arguments and statements. There is also a tendency in the discussion to insist on promoting common values in order to get proposals through.

What artistic practice can do is to create a so-called 'cool setting' where disagreements, debates and discussions can be voiced and staged in a completely different way. Art provides space for ways of expressing oneself and communicating that extend beyond mere objective

arguments and utterances. It offers tools to communicate sensory and embodied experiences, everyday experiences and emotions. These are important tools for expressing and understanding emotions, connections and disconnections, and expressing stories that might not otherwise be told. The performing arts are furthermore about being able to take on roles and thus train the imagination to see the world from a perspective that is not one's own. This is important for good communication and dialogue in planning. With the help of these 'role shifts' (for example, by 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), it becomes easier to familiarise oneself better with other perspectives and in this way learn more about the development area, oneself and about others.

Drama Lab invites the whole person to participate and does not reduce participants to their work-related roles. Consequently, it accommodates all the opinions, perspectives and emotions that a transformation process might bring. This makes Drama Lab complex. It is created to value complexity, dissensus and 'everything' the participants are. Instead of insisting on shared values, this also makes it easier to create, improve and maintain a good framework for disagreement.

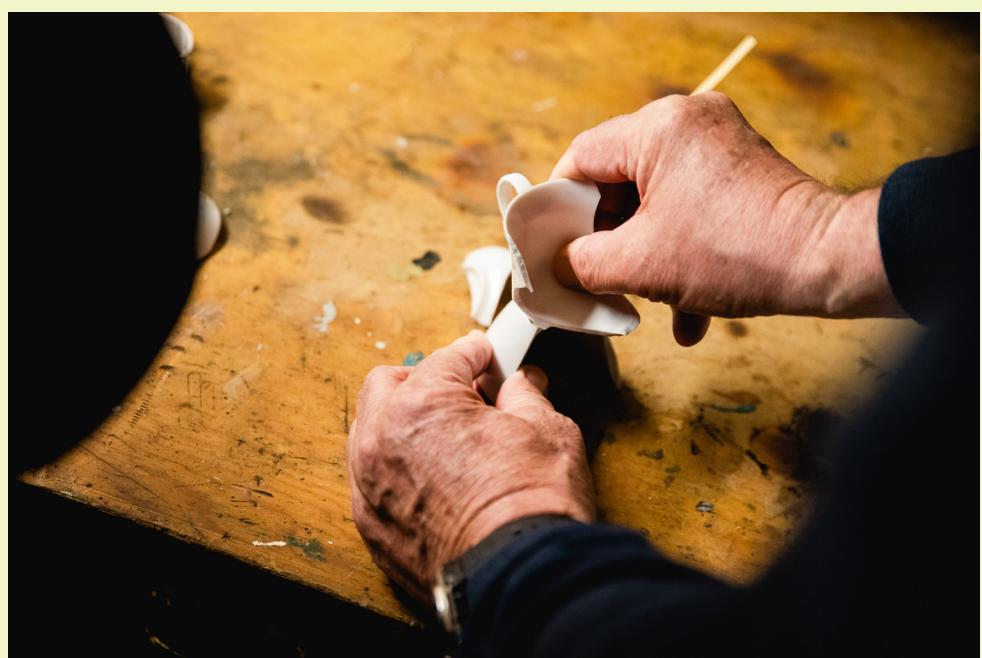
## 2.1 Expertise requirements

The fact that Drama Lab takes place in an artistic setting is necessary in order to offer the participants an arena that is different from other arenas for participation. Making the setting artistic allows one to stage things, therefore offering an alternate reality. This is necessary in order for the participants to dare and manage to step into perspectives that are not necessarily their own, and to 'join the game'. Therefore, an artistic approach is a premise for carrying out a full-scale Drama Lab.

Implementing a Drama Lab where the artistic premise is maintained requires resources and expertise from the arts field. It is particularly important to bring in people who possess professional expertise in the performing arts, including scenography, dramaturgy and acting. The Drama Lab guides are trained actors with particular expertise in dialogue-based and participant-based theatre. If you want to arrange a Drama Lab without trained expertise, the Drama Lab won't be a Drama Lab, but a participation process inspired by Drama Lab. One can compare cutting out the artistic expertise in Drama Lab with arranging a concert with performers who can read sheet music but can't play instruments. The musical quality of the concert depends on the artistic expertise required to play an instrument. Being able to read the sheet music isn't enough. Likewise, the absence of professional artistic expertise in the preparation and implementation of a Drama Lab will compromise the quality of the Drama Lab.







## 3. Guidelines for guides

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The guides' role and performance in the implementation of a Drama Lab is crucial. The guide is the bearing structure of Drama Lab and is responsible for guiding the participants through the planned conversation formats.

Because Drama Lab has a high degree of interactivity and a great deal of leeway is given to the participants, it is also the guides' responsibility to make sure the participants feel safe, so that they want to participate and share. In addition, the guides must make sure that the conversations are relevant and stay on topic.

We have already emphasised the importance of acquiring professional expertise when implementing a Drama Lab. There are trained Drama Lab guides that can help implement a Drama Lab. For those who are interested in investing in Drama Lab and want to carry out a series of Drama Labs themselves, there are

certification courses so that guide expertise becomes available in-house.

In the course, you learn how to work towards a clear guide role: What is the guide role? What are the rules of the game as a guide? How does the guide lead the conversations?

Below, we have compiled seven main 'guidelines' in this regard.

### 7 Guide-lines

#### **GUIDE-LINE 1: Create a safe environment**

- All participants must be welcomed and taken care of when they enter the room.
- Help the participants get into the swing of things. Start by letting them speak in a smaller setting where they are not in the spotlight.
- Never put the spotlight on your participants. In addition, assure participants that they will never be put into a situation where they are in the spotlight and have to speak in front of everyone unless they want to.
- What happens to one participant happens to all participants. The participants function almost as a collective 'we', and they will easily put themselves in the shoes of other participants. Therefore, all participants will easily feel that what

you do with/to one participant is also happening to them.

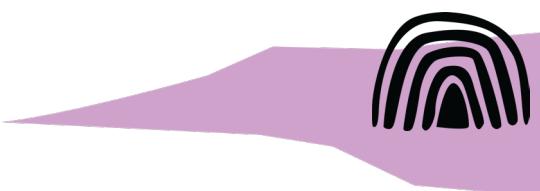
- The power of the name: Knowing someone's name relaxes people, it makes them feel remembered and they get closer to each other. If you remember someone's name, all participants will feel like they have a closer connection. Remembering someone's name is a trick to bring the group closer together, creating a relaxed, familiar atmosphere.
- Set clear time frames and adhere to them. Do not let things go over their allotted time - it violates the contract with the participants regarding the time they have set aside for this.
- Have clear guidelines/rules of the game, so that participants are never in doubt about what is going on and what is going to happen next.
- Make sure there is always the opportunity for participants to simply observe without having to actively participate.
- Address the individual rather than their role in society: the participants are there only as themselves and not as representatives of a predefined group (e.g. 'the architect', 'the developer', 'the municipality').
- Make it very clear that this is a 'game', where one is welcome to take on/explore perspectives and roles that are not one's own. This must be repeated throughout the lab so that participants can always rest assured that everyone understands that this is a game. At the same time, give the game value. The

game is necessary in order for the Drama Lab to achieve its full potential.

## **GUIDE-LINE 2: Trust in the guide's dramaturgical power**

- The guides control the lab, ensure progression and guide the participants safely through the planned programme.
- The guides make sure that the conversation feels relevant to everyone, while making sure that all participants can say what is on their mind.
- The guides take care of the rhythm, dynamics and tempo in the lab. For example, if the lab is slow and dragging on, the guide must offer something that picks up the pace and mood.
- The guides nudge the participants but don't push them.
- Never allow the progression of the lab to depend on the participants. By listening to the room, it is the guides who decide when it is time to move on to the next part of the programme, not the actions of the participants.
- Try to avoid giving all the attention to those who demand it. As a guide, you can make room for those who are not usually heard and seen without putting them in the spotlight.

## **GUIDE-LINE 3: Get an overview and try to hyperfocus at the same time**





**When we engage in play in this way, it becomes clear that this is about so much: emotions and identity, and you respect the place and also the other perspectives. I think this shows how complex this really is.**

*Participant (Female municipal worker in her 40s)*





«Når vi går inn i lek på denne måten, blir det klart at dette handler om så mye: om følelser og identitet, og du respekterer stedet og også de andre perspektivene. Jeg tror dette viser hvor komplekst dette egentlig er.» (kommunal kvinne, 50-årene).



- Listening to what is happening in the room is the guide's primary task.
- If you have started something with a participant, it must be completed and returned to at a different time. Do not forget about your participants. Only start discussions with certain participants about threads and ideas that you can remember to return to and conclude.
- All participants should always be activated. It is your task as a guide to have an overview.
- Value disagreement and different perspectives: here is a disagreement and that is exactly what we want!
- Steer clear of solutions: Steer clear of concrete proposals about what should actually happen in the area, because then the discussion will revolve around solutions rather than the general line of conflict such as preservation vs. demolition. Then you can say: we don't know what's going to happen, we are now talking about preservation or demolition.

#### **GUIDE-LINE 4: Drama Lab is serious but not pretentious**

- Call a spade a spade.
- Value the Drama Lab as something more than a game and an experiment. The participants must understand that what we do in Drama Lab is important and the outcome will have an impact on what happens next in the area.
- Be transparent: Acknowledge what is happening in the Drama Lab as an integral part of the action: What comes is what should be there. What happened was what was going to

happen. There is nothing that needs to take place in secret; if you want to give a message to the other guides then do it, if you want to ask for help with something, do so.

#### **GUIDE-LINE 5: Be a buddy and avoid taking on the expert role**

- Everyone is equal, and the guides should not put themselves above the participants, but instead be on the same level as them.
- Be careful of over-educational infantilising rhetoric: "I now think we have come up with a lot of good arguments, guys! Great job!" and "And we don't know what the right answer is" etc.
- Think IKEA instructions instead of having to explain things. Think that we are all equally bad at putting together an IKEA cabinet. You must be involved in finding out whether this is the wrong or correct way to do it.
- Refer to professionals/experts in order to give context/importance to what is being done in the Drama Lab. This can act as a 'third authority' where the guide avoids being an expert by referring to a third person who promotes what is going to happen. 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 aspects and perspectives."

### **GUIDE-LINE 6:**

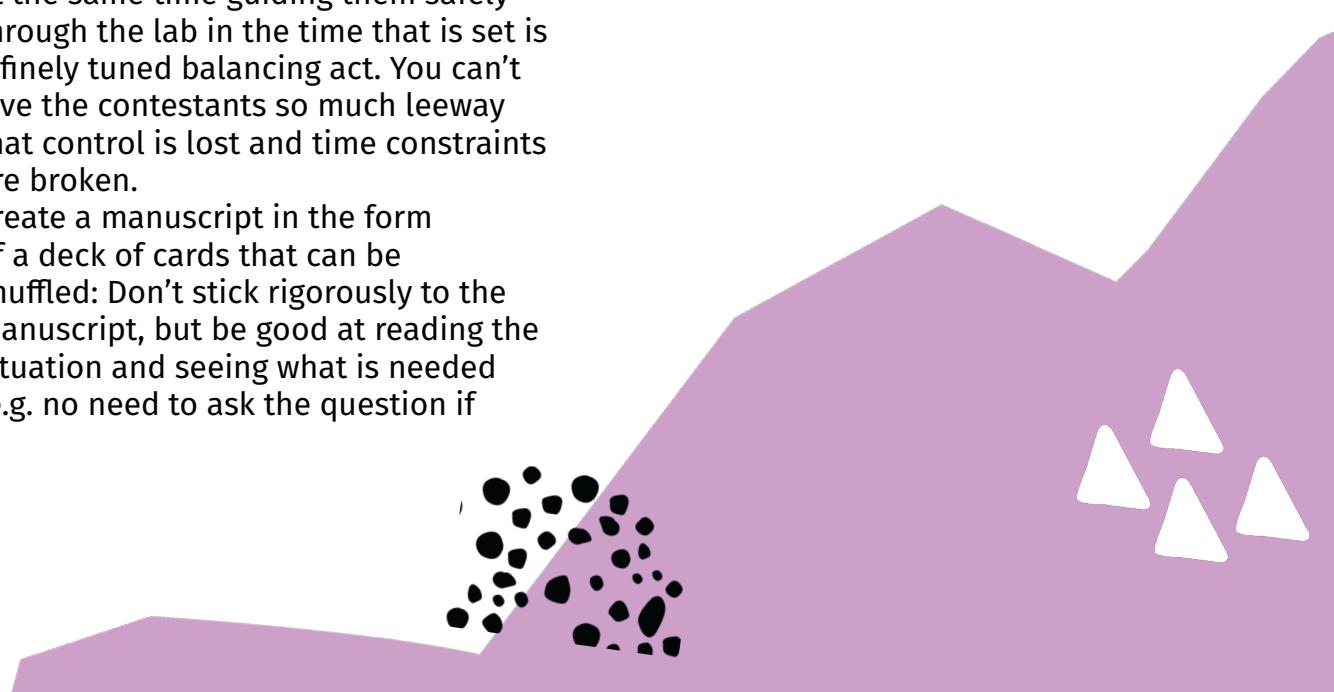
### **Be flexible in encounters with the participants and be curious about the participants' ideas**

- Drama Lab facilitates a high degree of interactivity right from the start. Try not to create one idea of what the lab should be like. The magic often happens when you use the suggestions and directions the participants want to try out.
- Create conversation formats that provide a lot of room for manoeuvre. We do not force participants into a conversation format, we introduce and provide clear guidelines - and the participants themselves decide how they want to proceed and perform.
- Think about the different outcomes and twists and turns the conversation format can create in encounters with participants, and create strategies to manage and utilise the suggestions the participants make.
- Balancing act: As a guide, you still have to lead the participants through the planned route. Knowing how much agency to give the participants and at the same time guiding them safely through the lab in the time that is set is a finely tuned balancing act. You can't give the contestants so much leeway that control is lost and time constraints are broken.
- Create a manuscript in the form of a deck of cards that can be shuffled: Don't stick rigorously to the manuscript, but be good at reading the situation and seeing what is needed (e.g. no need to ask the question if

someone disagrees with the perspective they have chosen when the whole group is clearly comfortable taking on the role of that perspective).

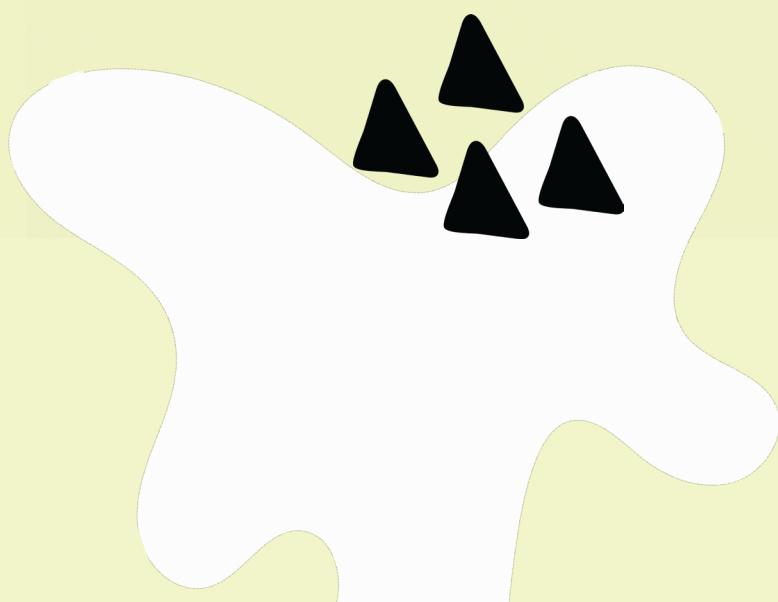
### **GUIDE-LINE 7: Set boundaries**

- As a guide, you don't have to accept all types of behaviour. Set clear boundaries for what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. For example, the guide shouldn't accept behaviour from participants who create a bad atmosphere and clearly show that they do not want to get involved. As a guide, it is easy to think that you should get everyone involved and work to make everyone happy. As a guide, if you feel that you are being pushed around, there are most likely some other participants who feel the same thing. Use your authority as a guide to set boundaries for all participants. If someone doesn't want to participate, address it and ask if they want to join the game. If not, they can leave.











# 4. Content: Conversations and rooms

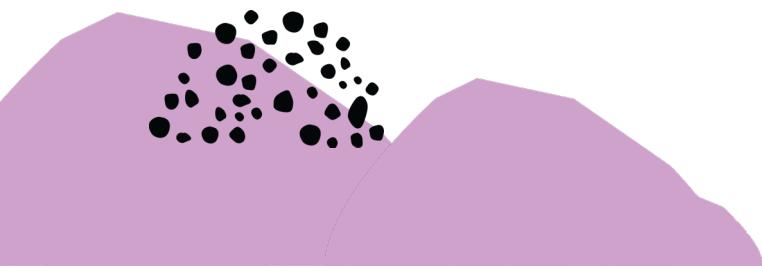
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A Drama Lab consists of a series of performative conversations and experiences. The dramaturgy moves from held and facilitated conversation formats to increasingly more open conversation formats. A Drama Lab ends in a completely open conversation. The idea is that the participants get more and more into the swing of things, and that Drama Lab provides enough shared experiences that they are both curious and comfortable to remain in a completely open conversation with each other after the facilitated programme is over.

The conversation formats and scenography described here have been developed into one specific 'case': the transformation of the hospital site at Bragernes in Drammen. The hospital will be moved to Brakerøya and the question is what will happen to the old hospital and the surrounding area. The hospital site itself has been acquired by the developer company called StorOslo Eiendom. The Drama Lab we describe here took place at Børresen school, which is located right next to the hospital site and in the actual area that is going to be transformed.

Although the description below relates to this specific case, it is transferable to other urban development and transformation projects. For example, demolishing or preserving the hospital block is a specific issue in the Bragernes Drama Lab case, but this is directly transferable to one of the main lines of conflict in urban development: change vs. preservation. With some local adaptations, the case we describe here can therefore easily be used in other urban development processes.

Please note that the explanations and descriptions below are intended as a set of instructions for how to perform a Drama Lab with trained guides and a scenographer.



## **Overview of sequence of events in a Drama Lab - step by step:**

- 1. Welcome: setting the tone**
- 2. Relationship to the area: warming up to talk and share**
- 3. Opening speech: introduction to the day's events**
- 4. Audio walk: see the area from a new perspective**
- 5. Echo chambers: take on roles and group mentality**
- 6. Rules of the game: prepare for battle**
- 7. Agonistic battle: face to face disagreement**
- 8. Circle conversation: reflecting from a personal perspective**
- 9. Meal: open conversation**

# STEP 1: Welcome

*The welcome sets the tone for the rest of the Drama Lab: Welcome and thank you for being here!*

## Description

The participants arrive at the location (Børresen school) and are met by a guide outside the entrance to the actual room where the Drama Lab will take place. Here, outside the room, the formal Drama Lab context is explained (who arranges the lab and why) and any consent forms (for photography, research, etc.) are signed. The guide informs the participants that when they enter the lab itself, no one needs to know their names, and that no formal group presentation will take place. Inside the lab, participants are greeted by a new guide serving snacks. Everyone receives a drink served in a porcelain cup. This is a way of providing a warm welcome, a gift that sets the tone: "Thank you for coming and for choosing to spend your afternoon together with us!" The guide asks participants to take a seat in the circle.

## Length

Until everyone has arrived.

## Room / scenography

Takes place at the entrance to the main room. Outside the door is a table covered with a tablecloth and it has consent forms placed on it. Just inside the door, in the foyer of the main room, there is another table covered with a tablecloth where snacks and drinks in porcelain cups are served. Music is played in the main room.

## Guidelines

- The welcome sets the tone for the rest of the lab and is therefore one of the most important moments in the meeting with the participants.
- It should be a pleasant and light atmosphere where everyone is seen and welcomed.
- There is a clear distinction between what happens outside the lab (formal: signing forms and brief information about context) and what happens inside the lab itself (informal: snacks, drinks, music).

## Goal

- Make people feel welcome and seen in a relaxed, low-threshold setting.
- Reassure participants that they can remain anonymous in the lab if they wish.
- Activate senses other than those normally triggered in an arena where topics such as transformation and urban development are discussed.
- Offer an alternative reality (through scenography and atmosphere) where the 'otherness' of the situation invites participants to dare and let go of their role, and invites the whole person into the process.
- Making the audience feel safe





# STEP 2: Relationship to the development area

*This conversation format provides space for participants' personal relationships with the place:  
What does this place mean to us?*

## Description

Participants are asked to sit down successively in a circle around a map of the area. The guides welcome each participant arriving at different times, so that the circle dynamically moves from an empty circle of chairs to a full circle of participants. The guides welcome and start conversations or invite people into existing conversations in the circle. The conversation revolves around the participants' personal relationship to the area that is visually accessible in the form of a stitched fabric map in the middle of the circle between them: What connection do they have to this place? What memories? What is your favourite place? When their cups are empty, participants are invited to place their cup on a place on the map that means something special to them. If they wish, they can also share why they have chosen to place the cup there. The guide gauges the atmosphere of the room. When the conversations drop in level and intensity and most people have placed their cups on the map, the guide taps on a glass and gathers everyone's attention. The guides share some of the stories about the cups with the group and are the last ones to put down their cups.

## Length

15-30 minutes (from when the first participant enters)

## Room / scenography

The scenography consists of materials that have a clear tactility. Once the participants have been served snacks and drinks, they enter a soft universe. The floor is covered with a textile (quilt) that has a map of the area sewn onto it. A circle of chairs are placed around the map. Music is played and the room has a large window overlooking the high-rise building of Drammen Hospital.

The map is hand-sewn using various qualities of velvet, colour-coded according to landowners. Key buildings are named, and a guide writes on the map throughout the conversation so that it continuously becomes more complex with new names of buildings and streets that mean something special to the participants. Things that are noted down are only 'dry' facts, not emotions attached to the place. The map is a foreshadowing an overview of the area the participants will explore for the rest of the day. The location of the cups is a direct contact between the participants and the room they are in, and with the place that the map represents.

## Guidelines

- Pleasant and light atmosphere-
- The map is a conversation-starter and the cup is an alibi (something to hold on to while offering a concrete activity: putting the cup on the map).
- No one should involuntarily receive focus from the whole group - it is about making offers, but not spotlighting.
- All participants should have someone to talk to and be activated, there are no observers (this includes the guides).
- Maximum of 5 people in each conversation, when this is exceeded, a new conversation is started. (This conversation format determines how many guides are needed. If there are 20 participants, the Drama Lab must have at least 4 guides, as there should be a guide present in each conversation held in the circle. Otherwise, the topics of the conversations can quickly go off-topic.)
- The guides have a joint responsibility to ensure that everyone who sits in the circle is seen, welcomed and incorporated into a conversation.
- The guides can rotate between conversations as needed, but they mustn't leave a conversation so that participants are left to fend for themselves unless this is the natural thing to do.
- The guides should learn the name of at least one participant and take note of the participant's story to share with the whole group at the end.

## Goal

- Meet participants' expectations from the start: we are here to talk about this area.
- Warming up participants: Get participants talking and get them to share.
- Allow a personal approach to the place: it is not about who we represent (municipality, developer, etc.), but our connection to the area.





# STEP 3: Opening speech

*The opening speech presents the day's programme and the purpose of what we are going to do.*

## Description

The guides welcome the whole group once again and give an introduction to what Drama Lab is. Firstly, the guides share some of the stories related to the different cups that have been placed on the map so that we get a common relationship to the 'us' the participants and guides represent, and to the cups on the map that represent different stories. The purpose of Drama Lab and its value is then explained in a participatory and urban development context. Emphasis is placed on building a new model for participation where differences and disagreements are at the centre. The goal is not a concrete result or input to the planning process, but to have conversations together that can facilitate getting to know each other and the area in new ways. The focus on play and role change is also emphasised: we should play with points of view and positions that are not necessarily our own. Finally, step by step, we introduce what is going to happen during the rest of the Drama Lab session.

## Length

5-10 min

## Room / scenography

Inside the main room. Same constellation as 'Relationship to the development area'.

## Guidelines

- Reassure participants that at no time will anyone be forced to say something out loud in front of others.
- Give the Drama Lab 'weight' and value by emphasising that it is an important arena for participation (despite the fact that it does not produce a concrete result).

## Goal

- Create a common awareness and relationship with the community and the 'us' that the specific lab participants and guides represent.
- Get a common relationship to the area that is to be transformed.
- Contextualise the project and the experience the participants will go through.
- Assure participants by providing a detailed description of what is going to happen in the event.
- Gather the attention and energy of the participants about the shared experience they will be part of.





# STEP 4: Audio walk / inspection

*The audio walk introduces different thoughts and visions for the area, seen from the perspectives of the place, buildings, things and nature.*

## Description

Participants go on an audio walk in the area. Here, they listen to what the different things, buildings, nature and places in the area think about the change the area will go through. Colin Carpark talks about the fear of a car-free city centre, Betty Bike Rack emphasises the importance of bikes and the road as a meeting place, The Tree dreams of standing in a forest, The Old Power Station is proud being a cultural monument that preserves history, and Matthew McDonald the take-away bag, dreams of a place where young people can hang out, etc. The audio walk ends with the participants slowly beginning to relate to the differences between themselves and what their thoughts are about the transformation of the area. Participants answer a series of questions by positioning themselves on opposite sides of the road. If they answer YES, they walk on the right side of the road, if they answer NO, they walk on the left side of the road. Questions that are asked: Do you feel at home in this part of Drammen? Do you think it is good that this area is going to be transformed? Do you feel that you have agency and can influence things regarding the development of this area? Are you worried about the future of this area? The final question asks participants to consider whether they want to demolish or preserve the hospital. To answer, they take a stand on opposite sides of a line drawn in the schoolyard. After the participants have chosen sides, they go to separate echo chambers.

## Length

30 min.

## Room / scenography

Outdoors, along a route from the school, around the hospital and back again. Besides

a couple of positioned props (i.e. take-away bag from McDonalds), the audio walk is completely site-specific, and relates to the place exactly as it is. The route is designed to give the audience an embodied and spatial relationship to the hospital site and surrounding areas.

### Guidelines

- The audio walk promotes different perspectives on the area (these are gathered through interviews with different actors, which are then translated into the personas and perspectives of 'things').
- The audio walk proceeds at a slow pace.
- The guide maintains the pace and leads the way, but never points out the things that speak (in that sense, it is not a guided tour, but more an individual exploration where the participants themselves have to find out who is talking to them).
- The things have heartfelt personalities, holding an ironic distance from things doesn't work.
- Maintain a poetic expression through the use of music and pauses for thought.
- The monologues of the different things are short and site-specific, commenting on the place they are in and providing clear visual markers (e.g.: 'here I stand, a single tree, fenced in between these yellow houses').

### Goal

- Give participants a new experience of the area and enable them to see the site in new ways.
- Introduce participants to different perspectives on the area.
- By giving perspectives to things, and not people, play, imagination and role change are highlighted.





**I like this model because it is in an early phase, it contributes to shaping the process, it is before, before, before, before. It teaches us to see the whole picture, not the enemy. It is not based on hate campaigns, and it is not about forming political parties around a single issue. It comes much earlier and lays the foundation for some values, so even if we see things differently, we want the same. So how do we deal with it? Both creatively and constructively?**

*Participant (Female municipal worker in her 30s)*







# STEP 5: Echo chambers for demolition and preservation

*In the echo chambers, we take on the role of being for or against demolition, and we create a black-and-white group dynamic where 'we' are right and 'they' are wrong.*

## Description

Outside their respective echo chambers, participants are asked if they are willing to take on the role of enthusiast for the perspective they have chosen (demolition or preservation) and fight for this perspective for the next hour. If the answer is yes, they are given a costume, an identity marker, (silk scarf for preservation and work gloves for demolition) that they put on in order to assume their role. Inside the echo chambers, the role is explored: Who are 'we' who wants to demolish/preserve the hospital? Why is this so important to us? During the conversation, the guides write down on small cards statements/arguments from the participants that support why their perspective is the right one. For example, "You are destroying Drammen's identity" and "We are taking care of the environment".

After arguments/statements have been collected, the perspective chosen by the participants is embodied. The demolition enthusiasts smash the cups that were placed on the map during The Welcome to mark places the participants have a special relationship with. They are given different tools for the purpose: crowbar, hammer, sledgehammer, etc. Preservation enthusiasts repair broken cups using the Japanese art of preservation called 'kintsugi'. They are given glue and gold dust which they use to put the pieces of the broken

cups back together again.

Finally, participants are told that the other group will visit their echo chamber. They then place the cards with the arguments and the broken/repaired cups around the room - in an installation that they think best represents their perspective. They then leave the room to visit the echo chamber of the other group.

### **Length**

25 min.

### **Room / scenography**

The echo chambers are site-specific (located in the basement of the school), each representing one of the standpoints. Each chamber is designed with two things in mind: a conversation in a circle with the chairs, and a physical manifestation of the standpoint; 'demolish' or 'preserve'. Both rooms are equipped with prefabricated argumentation cards starting with 'we' and 'you'.

**Echo chamber for preservation:** A cleared caretaker's room with a workbench and old drawers and cabinets filled with spare parts, light bulbs, old screws and half-finished repairs. On the workbench and various shelves and dressers along the wall are placed stations with broken cups and latex gloves. On one table is an extensive kintsugi repair kit,

and porcelain that has been previously repaired is exhibited on a shelf.

**Echo chamber for demolition:** An empty, bunker-like room with shabby brick walls and a concrete floor. On the floor is a small replica of the map from the main room, also hand-sewn in velvet materials. The cups from the main room are in the same place on the map where the participants placed them during the opening conversation. Various demolition tools are hanging on the wall; a club, a baseball bat, a hammer, a crowbar, a hockey stick, etc. Safety glasses are also available.

### Guidelines

- An 'us versus them' group mentality is to be developed here!
- Emphasise: we are playing and taking on a role that is not necessarily our own.
- Acknowledge that the participants are very different in their actual opinions and perspectives, and that most are in a grey area.
- Emphasise that we are not focusing on the grey area now, but on the polarized extremes.
- This can quickly become a game between facts and emotions: what we know can or should happen/and what we fear/want to happen - be sure to make room for both types of arguments.
- All arguments are good arguments!
- Formulate all arguments so that they begin with either 'We' or 'You'.
- Bring in perspectives from the cup placements and the audio walk if needed.

### Goal

- Building a group mentality.
- Help participants take on and explore a role that is not necessarily their own.
- Exploring the transformation of the area from a black and white perspective.
- Move to the extremes.
- Embody perspectives through physical activity (smash/glue cups together).



**I was surprised to realize how easy it is to give in to the perspective you are in, in echo chambers!**

*Participant (Female municipal worker in her 40s)*



Vi vil ta vare  
På Drammens  
spel -

Dere  
er bare  
og godt  
av





# STEP 6:

## Rules of the game

*Here, each group explores how the opposing party has cultivated their perspective and we introduce the context and rules of the game before the groups face each other for battle.*

### Description

The two groups pass each other in silence and enter each other's echo chamber to see how the other party has cultivated their perspective. There, they get to see what kind of activity their opponent has been doing, and they get to read the arguments their opponents have written down in preparation for the battle. It is in each other's echo chamber that the rules of the game are introduced and contextualised. The rules of the game are contextualised by introducing the term 'agonist', which means an opponent with a common set of values, but who disagrees on how to practice the values. The guide for each group brings out a chessboard. The board is used to demonstrate the rules of the game and to illustrate the setup of the agonistic conversation that the participants are to take part in after the echo chambers. After the rules of the game are introduced, each group goes to the battle arena.

### Suggested length

10 min

### Room / scenography

Preservation echo chamber and demolition echo chamber as before. In each room, there is a small chessboard with pre-arranged pieces.

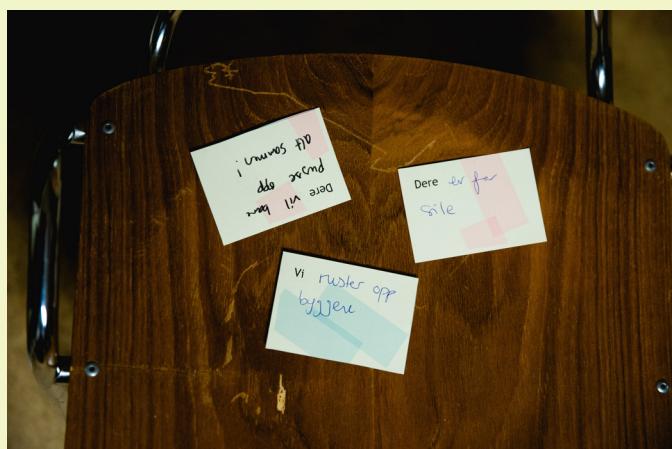
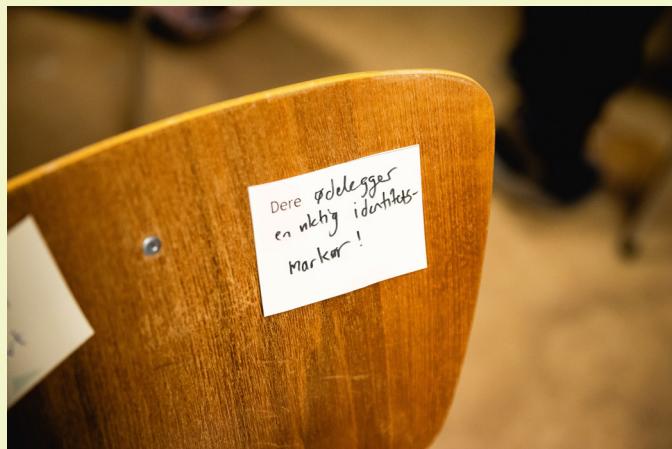
## Guidelines

- Allow participants to go to the extreme of their perspective.
- Reassure participants that they can be agonists even if they have behaved hatefully and emotionally towards their opponents: The extremes of one perspective can often be quite emotional and hateful towards the other group, and it is difficult to balance this after introducing the term 'agonist', which suggests that one should not see the other party as an enemy. Participants are often uncertain whether they have behaved like antagonists (enemies) and not been 'good' agonists. It is important here to emphasise that we are playing, and that it's important to practice being in disagreement, furthermore one can play with emotions and points of view that are not one's own.)

## Goal

- Explore the arguments of the opponents without them being physically present.
- Construct the image of the opponent as disrespectful/barbarian/messy/without aesthetic sense/without care etc.
- Explain the purpose and theoretical background of the upcoming battle (Chantal Mouffe's theory of agonist versus antagonist).
- Explain the rules of the game for the upcoming battle.





# STEP 7:

## Agonist battle

*The groups meet in battle. It is 'we' versus 'you'. Each group fights for their perspective and tackles the disagreement face to face.*

### Description

The participants face each other in two groups and point out the disagreements between them in the form of statements that start with 'we' or 'you'. Participants speak only on behalf of their group and the perspective they represent. It is not a goal to answer the statements of the opponent, and participants are instructed to listen to the statements and then let them go. Sometimes, pockets of silence will arise. The guides participate in the same way as the rest of the participants. The battle is concluded after 15 minutes by all contestants leaving their role as preservation or demolition enthusiasts, and thanking each other for the battle with a high five.

### Length

15 min.

### Room / scenography

The conversation takes place in the main room which has been cleared for the battle. The quilt is pulled/folded away to a short side of the room, the chairs are stacked in a line at the other end of the room, and the floor is bare showing a chessboard pattern.

## Guidelines

- Avoid correcting participants who do not follow the rules of the game, correct participants by following the guidelines yourself.
- Allow various forms of statements; both 'smart' and emotive statements should be accommodated.
- Avoid a ping-pong of statements.
- Allow what comes to come: all forms of emotion are allowed. We improvise together with the participants, and support what is to come.
- 15 minutes may seem like a long time, but it is not. Allow for it to drag out and arguments to be repeated - it will come in waves and the participants must be given the opportunity to feel uncomfortable.

## Goal

- Meeting and standing in disagreement face to face.
- Acknowledging the opposing party's arguments.
- Challenging one's own point of view.
- Experiencing the 'frustrating feeling' of being stuck in a polarised debate.





**I realized that we must meet face to face to acknowledge that the other side has valid points. We must not do this on social media.**

*Participant (Male resident in his 50s)*



**I was surprised that both sides had such similar arguments. We want the same!**

*Multiple Participants*





**The confrontation in the battle made me braver, and I dared to ask the difficult questions afterward.**

*Participant (Male developer in his 50s)*



# STEP 8:

## Circle conversation

*In this conversation, we sit with our backs to each other and reflect on the day's experiences from a personal, 'I' perspective.*

### Description

The participants each 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. The guide asks them to speak from their own personal perspective and share their thoughts, reflections and experiences from what they have experienced in the Drama Lab. Every input should start with 'I' to ensure a personal approach. After 15 minutes, the guide ends the conversation and points out the importance of what we have done here today. It also points to the way forward: what impact will this have on further work regarding the area? Finally, the guide invites the participants out into the schoolyard. Here, more thoughts from the day can be shared in a more informal setting, over bowls of soup and drinks.

### Length

15 min.

### Room / scenography

The participants each find a chair and place it in the ring from the opening conversation, but this time with their backs facing each other. The circle activates and removes the participants' visual sense.

## Guidelines

- The conversation is not a discussion/dialogue, but a place where each participant can express their experience and perspective.
- The fact that the participants are not sitting and looking at each other provides a freedom that makes it easier for people to dare to speak up.
- We try to avoid this becoming just an educational reflection on the battle or a direct feedback on the concept ('You did a great job developing this session!').
- We are looking for participants to share personal reflections on how what they have experienced in the Drama Lab has affected them and given them new perspectives on each other and/or the area.
- The guides participate if there is a need to steer the conversation in the 'right' direction.
- Avoid personal attacks and ping-pong statements between inputs.
- Avoid the conversation becoming too intellectualised and fact-based (what is actually going to happen in the area) - try to keep it on a personal level.

## Goal

- Provide space for sharing thoughts and reflections on a personal level.
- Give participants 'free' room to express themselves.
- Find out:
  1. What thoughts the participants actually have about the place (including agency and influence).
  2. What the Drama Lab did for the participants (including changing perspectives and opinions about the Drama Lab and the place).





**I became more understanding and receptive to the arguments from the opposite side, which would have made it easier for me to accept it if their side won.**

*Participant (Male student in his 30s)*

# STEP 9:

## Concluding meal

*The lab's final conversation is completely open and informal. Here, all participants and guides share a meal together. The meal lasts as long as the participants want.*

### Description

Participants head out to the schoolyard where they can help themselves to soup, bread, wine and beer. It is free seating and everyone finds a place to sit or stand. This conversation has no overarching agenda or form and has an open ending. Here, the participants get the opportunity to set their own agenda and talk to their fellow participants about whatever may concern them and interest them. The guides use their dramaturgical power to connect participants, get them to introduce themselves and talk to each other. In addition, it is the guides' task to try to keep the conversations on topic, if appropriate.

### Length

Open ended.

### Room / scenography

A table is set up with soup, bread, toppings, juice, wine and beer.

### Guidelines

- Be aware of the guide's dramaturgical power, even when the conversation is as open as it is. Make sure everyone has someone to talk to.

- Use what you have learned about the participants from the Drama Lab in the conversation: what do you really think about the hospital? Demolition or preservation? Wasn't quite sure what you were thinking there...
- Create synergies between people. Your role is to create encounters and conversations between the participants, rather than you as a guide being an integral part of the conversations. Trust that the shared experience the participants have had can lay a foundation for them to have a conversation together.
- Make sure everyone feels they can help themselves to the food on offer.
- Create a casual atmosphere. Eat and drink with the participants.
- Listen to the room. Don't force yourself into conversations and topics.

### Goal

- Conversations between participants.
- Create a meeting place between the participants where they set the agenda.









**I found it very instructive to accommodate the differences and respect the perspectives of the other group. And to handle disagreement because it was so clear that everyone was on this common 'island of values'. So it was a very safe arena. A safe tool to use.**

*Deltager (Kvinnelig kommunearbeider i 50-årene)*

# 5. Practical: Preparation

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## 1. Context - change/no change

The starting point for hosting a Drama Lab is that an area is going to be changed - preferably an area in an existing neighbourhood, so that many people have a personal relationship to it. Drama Lab is also particularly suitable if clear lines of conflict have already emerged related to the change. For example: The old theatre house in Skien is going to be refurbished, but there is great disagreement in the community as to whether it should become a shopping centre or a new concert hall.

## 2. Communication and local anchoring

Drama Lab is a new concept that challenges more traditional ways of thinking about participation, especially with regard to what the desired outcome may be in participation processes. To achieve its full potential as a meeting place, Drama Lab therefore requires good communication and thorough establishment work among relevant actors (municipalities, local organisations, developers, etc.).

The fact that Drama Lab does not result in a report with concrete input, solutions and wishes from 'the people' has proven to be challenging for anchoring the Drama Lab's locally. When a product is to be sold, it is essential for the buyer to see the value the product provides. The value of Drama Lab is not easy to demonstrate in an easy-to-understand, and not least measurable, way. Drama Lab offers a value that lies in the meeting between the participants,

the engagement the lab creates and the impact the lab has on further work with, and discussions about, the area. This might involve a change in attitudes, new interfaces between actors or a broader understanding of the lines of conflict that may apply in the development of a given area. 'Selling' the value of conversation, the value of inviting more perspectives and the value of increasing understanding of others' perspectives requires patience and smart and customised communication.

The importance of acknowledging that Drama Lab cannot be sold through a quick and smart pitch is necessary in dealing with the time, resources and adversity that can arise in the process of selling something that challenges old ways of thinking, and old ways of considering what is valuable in an urban development process.

Local anchoring therefore requires patience and repetitive, smart and customised communication.

Although local anchoring can be resource-intensive and time-consuming, it has been shown that the actual anchoring and establishment of a Drama Lab often coincides with increased understanding of participation and increased engagement in and enthusiasm for the development area in the concerned network of actors. As a result, we can argue that the local anchoring of a Drama Lab has an intrinsic value in the form of increased engagement in and enthusiasm for the development area and increased understanding of and interest in participation



## 2. Recruitment

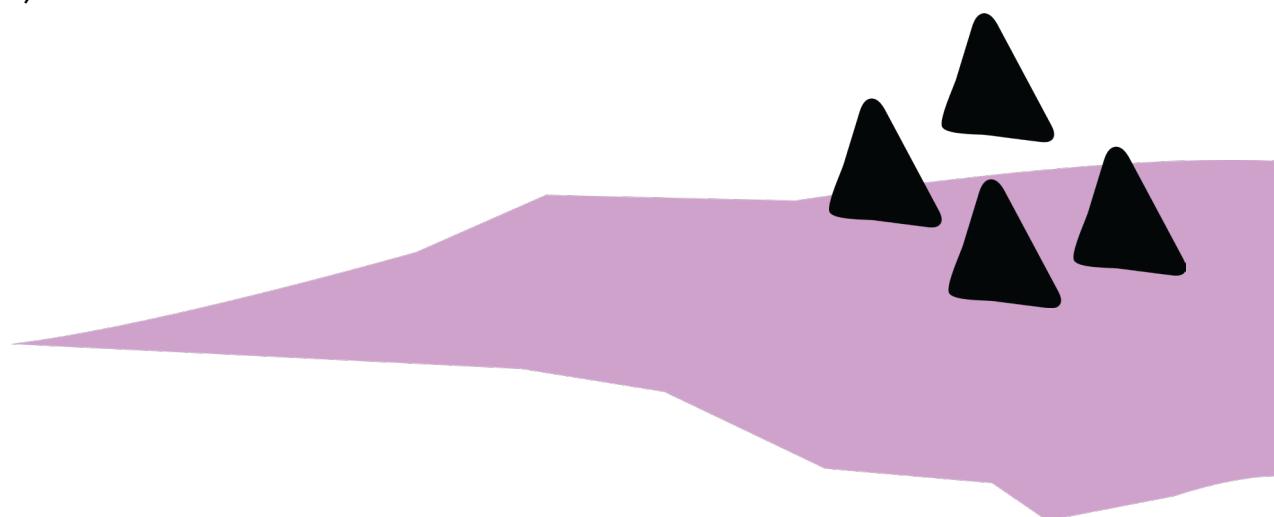
Drama Lab is nothing without participants. Only when the topic and framework for a Drama Lab have been determined can you start recruiting. Set aside enough time and resources for recruitment. We have outlined 5 tips for recruitment on the following page.

## 3. Rehearsal period

Drama Lab requires a rehearsal period in order to be implemented properly. In exactly the same way as the staging of a theatrical performance, time is required to learn the manuscript, develop the concept, create the performance and design the scenography. Expect the artistic team to need 2-5 rehearsal weeks.

## 4. Resources

An artistic team is required for the implementation of a Drama Lab, as well as a communication and marketing budget to engage and recruit participants and ambassadors. In addition, there are some coordination tasks related to practical implementation (premises, food, communication).



### 3 advices regarding local anchoring

1. Find someone in the municipality who is passionate about participation and who can be the leading figure for promoting Drama Lab as a new, innovative and exciting participatory method that challenges old ways of thinking about participation.
2. Identify Drama Lab's actor network and recruit Drama Lab ambassadors: Arrange a series of meeting points in relation to a Drama Lab, preferably a year to half a year before the actual lab takes place. Start by introducing Drama Lab in Drama Lab's actor network; associations, municipal employees, politicians and developers. Introduce Drama Lab in a safe and traditional way. Preferably through a simple presentation. Involve the actor network and keep the actor network active, for example to test different versions of Drama Lab before the actual implementation. Having local ambassadors who can help with implementation and recruitment is key to obtaining a diverse list of participants, and it also fosters local ownership of the Drama Lab.
3. Spend time establishing contact with and involving the developer or potential developer(s) of the area in the process. The developer plays a key role in the development of an area, and it is important that they are present in a Drama Lab to support Drama Lab's integration in the urban development 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 also pays off to emphasise that developers will participate in Drama Lab as individuals, and that no one therefore needs to know that they are the 'developers'.

## 5 tips for recruitment

1. Be aware of what is being communicated. It is important that those 'selling' Drama Lab to potential participants have experienced or have received a thorough introduction to what Drama Lab is about. They can then communicate more easily with potential participants about what Drama Lab is. There will certainly be some questions, as this is a new and different concept.
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 a Drama Lab also has an effect.
3. It is a good idea to contact potential participants personally and customise the invitation so that it is clear why it is important that this particular participant comes to the Drama Lab. Spend additional time informing people who you think may have a genuine interest in participating so that it feels relevant and logical to the person being contacted. For example, residents of the case area, municipal employees, developers, politicians, artists or young people.
4. Carefully consider who is communicating. It is an advantage if the communicators are people whom the recipient trusts. Carefully select different senders for different groups of people, and think about who trusts who. There is a lot of time to save here by strategically selecting the right sender for different recipients. Here, the Drama Lab ambassadors who were recruited in the establishment work often play a key role.
5. Be careful using words associated with art and theatre methodologies. Many people find theatre and art as a methodology in combination with participant involvement rather intimidating (they don't want to act) and frivolous (what has that got to do with the planning process?). There are many nice synonyms you can use in your communication and establishment work that describe what a 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.

# 6. Practical: Implementation

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## 1. Meeting place

The meeting place should be accessible and easy to find. It should be inviting and open. Participants should feel welcome, and there should be a relaxed atmosphere. We chose to hold the Drama Lab at Børresen school because this is a familiar place for people in the local area and it gave us the opportunity to be close to the residents.

## 2. Room use and location

The rooms should be able to offer a constructed reality that supports concept and function. We avoided using standard classrooms, but instead found rooms that supported the concept. For example, the Echo Chamber for Preservation took place in the school's caretaker workshop for repair and maintenance. The rooms must also have the potential to be transformed using scenography. It is advantageous to utilise the site-specific potential of each room used, rather than stripping it down to an idea of neutrality.

## 3. Timeframe and duration

A Drama Lab has clearly defined timeframes. For many people, Drama Lab as a format can be unfamiliar, new and a little intimidating. Reassuring participants using fixed and clear timeframes is key to

making them more relaxed. Timeframes must also be communicated in the recruitment process so that participants can organise other plans around the Drama Lab. However, the communal meal we share at the end has an open ending. The meal continues until the last participant decides to leave, only then does the Drama Lab team start to pack things away. Bragernes Drama Lab lasted two and a half hours, and then we had the communal meal.



# 7. Case: Bragernes Drama Lab

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*Here is a small, additional taste of a part of Bragernes Drama Lab to give a deeper understanding and insight into what Drama Lab can be.*

## **Example: The echo chamber for preservation enthusiasts**

Participants are invited to explore a perspective by exploring the extremes of a line of conflict. Participants get to choose between fighting for the hospital to be demolished or for it to be preserved. Participants who have chosen to enter the Preservation Perspective are stopped outside the door of the Preservation Enthusiasts' Echo Chamber. They are welcomed by the guide and asked the question: "Are you willing to take on the role of a preservation enthusiast?" Those who answer yes hand in their headphones (as they are coming from the audio walk) and are given a silk scarf to wear. They enter the room and sit down on one of the chairs placed in a circle. Inside the echo chamber for preservation enthusiasts, there is an harmonious atmosphere. A pleasant light. In the room, there are various old tools and gadgets from many years back. For example, a woodworking machine from the 1950s. Rusty and charming. We want to give a sense of a time perspective. The scenography provides a reminder of history and memories. Porcelain cups that have been smashed are displayed on one shelf, but they have been repaired using kintsugi - a Japanese art tradition of gluing together broken porcelain tableware with gold. This is a metaphor for embracing what is broken

and imperfect, and turning it into something beautiful, functional, and durable.

At this point, participants should be made aware that they are participating in a game and that they will take on a role as enthusiasts and advocates for preservation, i.e. they have agreed to pretend to be or take on the role of preservation enthusiasts at the extremes of the line of conflict; demolish-preserve. However, they may feel a little uncertain about this. What am I involved in here? What is it? I am not really sure what I think about this? I think the best thing for the area is that it is demolished, but I wonder what the arguments actually are for preserving the building. Can I learn something new? Can I confirm that I am correct that there are only silly arguments to be made from this perspective?

Since the participant may think differently about what this game and role means, and why they ended up choosing this perspective - it is important that the guides lead them clearly and safely into the role and game by:

- Acknowledging that they are very different in their actual opinions and perspectives.
- Reassuring them that it is a game and a role they have taken on.
- Saying something about what they will be doing over the next hour.

Once everyone has sat down on a chair, everyone is sitting in a circle with silk scarves around their necks or on their heads (optional how one wishes to wear it) together with the guides. The guides begin by acknowledging that the participants are very different in their actual opinions and



perspectives and are probably in a grey area between demolition and preservation. However, we are now going to step into the role of preservation enthusiasts. Who are we? What do we stand for? Why? Already at this point, the participants start to get involved (usually). Stories start to pop up: The building has always been part of the city - it stands there as a building symbolising important history. Everyone has a relationship with the hospital - I have given birth there, you have been born there, my parents died there, my neighbour worked there. Yes, the building itself is ugly, but can't we turn it into something good? Can't we think a little creatively? Why should the solution always be to demolish everything? Precisely because this is the tendency in Drammen, I think it is even more important to preserve this building! No more demolition! I don't believe that there are any other reasons than that the developers want to make money and then disappear! They don't care about cultural heritage, cultural treasures, architectural history, and identity markers! Enough is enough!

The stories and arguments (true or false) keep on coming. The guides rephrase them to fit into the form that will be used later in the agonistic battle. "We want to preserve the city's identity markers!" "You lot tear everything down!". The guides formulate this out loud and write it down on notes of paper while they prompt more arguments from the participants. The guides also help to come up with and share arguments. We are all preservation enthusiasts in this echo chamber.

In this section, the guides work to increase the intensity and stir up the mood. We (the group) are right and you (the other group) are wrong. We are victims. They are attackers. When the atmosphere has heated up and some arguments have been produced, the guide introduces the next task.

The guide talks about the kintsugi art and asks the participants to get into pairs or stay on their own. They are going to choose one of the broken cups lying around the room. Next to it are gloves and kintsugi equipment. The guides come around with the gold mixed with glue and participants can start repairing and preserving.

In some cases, it might not have been that easy to stir up the mood during the first part. Maybe there weren't that many stories and arguments, and maybe there wasn't a group atmosphere. You should then start earlier with task two and the kintsugi part, and ask the participants to talk while they repair. Together, they can talk about various arguments that they will tell to the guides who walk around talking to them and writing down what is said in the 'we' and 'you' form.





**Want  
to try  
Drama**

**Don't hesitate to  
reach out for a chat if  
you think Drama Lab  
might be the thing  
for your municipality.**

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