

## Deliverable 5.2 - Set of recommendations for promotion of women and underrepresented groups

<b>Project Full title</b>	Generative European Commons Living Lab
<b>Project Acronym</b>	gE.CO Living Lab
<b>Grant Agreement No.</b>	822766
<b>Coordinator</b>	University of Turin
<b>Project start date and duration</b>	February 2019 - January 2022
<b>Project website</b>	<a href="https://generative-commons.eu">https://generative-commons.eu</a>
<b>Deliverable Nr.</b>	5.2
<b>Deliverable date</b>	November 30, 2021
<b>Work Package No</b>	WP5
<b>Work Package Title</b>	gE.CO DIY Inclusion
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<b>Status:</b>	
<b>Dissemination level:</b>	

## Versioning and contri

Version	Date	Comment	Authors
v.01	November 2019	Based on discussion with partners initial set up.	OLA, UNITO
v.02	December 2019	Interviews with community members	OLA
v.03	April 2020	Finalisation of interviews	OLA
v.04	May 2020-October 2020	Restructuring of methodology and planning of following research	OLA, UNITO
v.05	November-December 2020	Preparation of focus group preliminary contacts with communities	OLA
v.06	January 2021	Focus group conduct	OLA
v.07	February-April 2021	Data examination	OLA, UNITO
v.08	May 2021	Preparation of Participatory Actions	OLA, UNITO
v.09	June-July 2021	Participatory Actions	OLA
v.10	September - November 2021	Data collection and examination. Finalisation of deliverable	OLA, UNITO



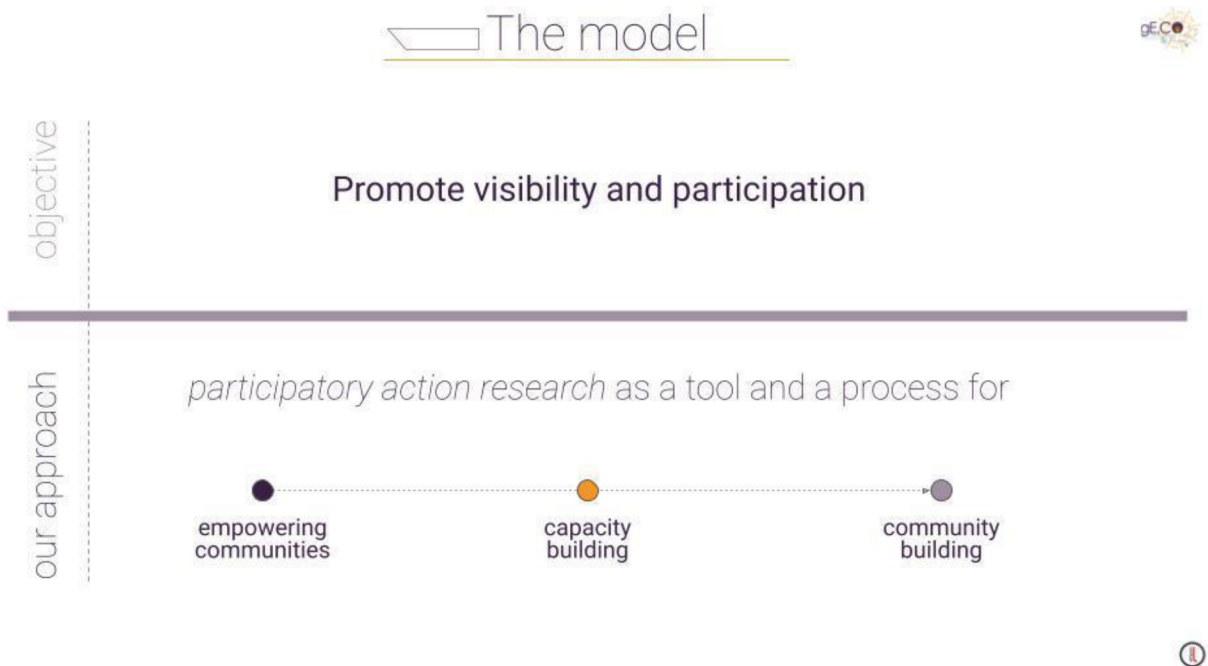
## Introduction:

The deliverable D5.2 involves a set of recommendations for promoting visibility and participation of women and other under-represented groups in commons initiatives. This deliverable includes open access recommendations and instructions for the configuration of participatory models that explicitly promote the visibility of women and open up participation to under-represented groups.

Moreover, through this deliverable we aim to define strategies which promote visibility and participation at the European level. Starting from the local point of our focus, which is Greece, we tried to think and elaborate on the factors and aspects that we propose, which we believe have taken into consideration the broader European context.

Our approach for this participatory model stems from our values as a research collective, that tries to promote social innovation and consists of the following three pillars:

- Empowerment
- Capacity building
- Community building



*Empowerment of communities* by giving them voice. We employed a bottom up approach to conduct our research in order to provide the communities we worked with the opportunity to express themselves and take the floor. For Open Lab Athens this mode of conduct is crucial in our target to work and design *with* communities instead of *for* them.

*Capacity building* means giving communities we work with the necessary tools and space to expand and elevate their ability to continue their everyday activities well after the research procedure has ended. We do not conceive of this aspect in the traditional way of seminars but as a challenge to transform academic knowledge and research into tangible experiences of equal interaction which could be capable of producing social innovation.

*Community building* fostered through the research process. Sometimes a research project can be more than an academic product. We believe that employing participatory action research can help fabricate a plexus of relationships among people who are part of the process. These relationships can in turn be the cornerstone for creating a community among researchers and various stakeholders and acting subjects.

As a final remark, we need to point out that the condition of COVID19 pandemic had a crucial impact not only on our design of the data collection process, but also on the general approach of our key concepts. Moreover, the pandemic provided a lens through which we could revisit the issue of visibility and participation in extreme conditions and at the same time gave us a chance to imagine and rethink ways to amplify them anew.

## Methodology:

### Theoretical sensitivity:

Our theoretical framing aims to give several analytical tools, which could function in the direction of synthesizing and forming new strategies about women's visibility and participation. However, we didn't want to preconceive the research process with our own ideas on what participating in a commons initiative should look like, feel or seem. That's why we opted to go into the field following a framework of **theoretical sensitivity**. Theoretical sensitivity as a term was first coined by Barney Glaser in 1978, and refers to the notion that the researcher brings his/her theoretical impressions within the framework of *grounded theory research*.

By *theoretical sensitivity* we mean that we collected readings and theoretical ideas which seemed to *talk* about our research project but didn't exactly provide concrete and formalised solutions for our research questions. Moreover, the idea refers to our ability to examine and question our underlying assumptions of the area we're researching, including the things we've





read, absorbed and used in everyday thought and practice. By enhancing our theoretical sensitivity we acknowledge that as researchers we are the sum of our knowledge and experiences and seek to account for this knowledge and experiences throughout the research process. By following this train of thought, we believe that we can become conscious of what we don't know.

To undertake this task we also tried to utilize what the American pragmatist philosopher Charles S. Peirce (1958) first introduced: the concept of abduction. Abduction is something between deduction and induction, referring to a selective and creative process in which the researcher carefully investigates how far empirical “facts” (or data) agree with theory or hypothesis and how far they call for modifications of it. It is about discovering new concepts, ideas or explanations by finding surprising events, which cannot be routinely explained by pre-existing knowledge. Thus, by abduction, the researcher goes beyond data as well as the pre-existing theory or theories. It is an innovative process because every new insight is a result of modifying and elaborating prior knowledge or putting old ideas together in new ways as the researcher explores and tries to explain the new data. Abduction is hence the source of scientific creativity.

Following the aforementioned trajectory we decided to build on the ideas of John Berger, Lauren & D'Ignazio and Urban Studies as an academic discipline and lived experience.

### John Berger:

John Berger created a TV series and published a book, *Ways of seeing* in 1972<sup>1</sup>. We mostly drew on his idea that women in a patriarchal and capitalist societal setting, tend to internalise the *male gaze* (i.e. how men see women) as far as what they think about themselves. Thus, seeing is an action which is culturally determined, and should be examined and criticised as a set of given societal practices. Berger delves into distinctions between optics and perspectives, how our private conscience resembles mechanical eyes by selecting *what our lens chooses to focus on and what to neglect*. Seeing is fundamental. It's not only for looking out, it is for placing oneself in relation to what one sees both physically and metaphorically. Seeing is not a neutral thing but always a way of seeing.

Moreover, Berger proposes the following: *The way we see things is affected by what we know and what we believe.[...] We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice. [...] We never look at just one thing. We are always looking at the **relations** between things and ourselves.*

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<sup>1</sup> The book can be found [here](#).



[...] *The way we look at things is affected by the learned assumptions we have about that thing*<sup>2</sup>

We wanted to see how these set of actions would resonate with women from the communities we worked with. Following that line of thought, we regarded visibility and seeing as being active and as carrying agency and not something that people do passively. The ideas of John Berger lead us to think about the essence of how we learn to reflect on the social aspects of the act of seeing. As Berger put it, we see relations among objects not mere objects. In this realm, having the assumption of increasing visibility of underrepresented groups through a set of recommendations, we should turn our focus on how we see these communities and more importantly how current societal relations and discriminations are constructed and re-produced within and around them.

### Data feminism

We drew from *Data feminism*<sup>3</sup> a book written from Lauren Klein and Cathrine D'Ignazio which is a prominent example of how research can be appropriated by feminist values and ideas. The introduction of the book is titled "*Why does Data Science need feminism*". We paraphrased that title into the more general one, "*Why does research need feminism*". To answer the question they pose the authors propose several principles. We've made a selection that we thought could fit better to our research questions and project in general.

- *Elevate emotion and embodiment.* Value multiple forms of knowledge, including the knowledge that comes from people as living, feeling bodies in the world.
- *Rethink binaries and hierarchies.* Challenge the gender binary, along with other systems of counting and classification that perpetuate oppression
- *Embrace pluralism.* The most complete knowledge comes from synthesizing multiple perspectives, with priority given to local, Indigenous, and experiential ways of knowing.
- *Consider context.* Data or knowledge are not neutral or objective. They are the products of unequal social relations, and this context is essential for conducting accurate, ethical analysis and research.
- *Make labor visible.* All work in the world is the work of many hands. Data feminism makes this labor visible so that it can be recognized and valued.

We saw some familiarity between the authors' work and the communities we tried to reach. Most of the projects presented in the book were set up and deployed by people that were part

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<sup>2</sup> Berger, pp.8-11.

<sup>3</sup> The book in digital form can be found [here](#).



of what we call under-represented groups, women, people of color, people belonging to LGBTQi+ and nonbinary, Indigenous and women from the Global South.

One of the most important lessons we drew from the work of Lauren Klein and Cathrine D'Ignazio was the idea that intersectional feminism<sup>4</sup> and hacktivist principles should and can be used to promote accountability through reflection on one's own systemic privileges and experiences of oppression. Research process somehow becomes a tool which can have an emancipating effect on communities and passive research subjects are turned into actors trying to improve how they work and live in the world.

## Urban Studies

*"it is space and not time that hides consequences from us"*<sup>5</sup>

Social events, phenomenons, transformations and dynamics are more and more interconnected in the digital world, but at the same time they are fragmented and it is impossible to reach their essence without acknowledging their geographical projections. **Urban studies** that have to do with *being* and *living* in the urban space would be a meaningful tool in our attempt to create a DIY model for inclusion. The aspects of visibility and participation are principally connected with the physical space of the city because this is the context within which the communities we worked with operate for the most part. Urban space functions as the theatre of social life. As Lewis Mumford describes it in his article "What is a city?", "the city in its complete sense, is a geographic plexus, an economic organization, an institutional process, a *theatre of social action*, and an aesthetic symbol of collective unity"<sup>6</sup>. All these parameters which give meaning to the city as a social entity could be conceived as the fields where gender identities become visible or take action by affecting everyday routines. Especially the notion of the city as a theatrical stage could help us to see through an alternative frame how different under-represented groups take part in or excluded from the "urban play" and how gender identities are performed or hidden in public life.

Our intention is to examine the way communities are living in the city space and map the characteristics of the material dimension of their difficulties in terms of visibility and participation in everyday life. It is also important to understand how these behaviours are in constant interaction with dominant narratives and how they disrupt them by creating

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<sup>4</sup> Intersectional feminism (or intersectionality) is an extension of feminist thought, an analytical framework that tries to conceptualise how discrimination is based on different and multiple identities and political inclinations. Some of the factors that lead to oppression are skin color, gender, sexual orientation, identity, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Berger, J. (1967) "The Changing View of Man in the Portrait" In Berger, J. (2001) Selected Essays New York: Pantheon

<sup>6</sup> Mumford, L. (2011). "What is a City?": Architectural Record (1937): 28-32.



discontinuities on how the urban space is perceived. In this direction, “the multiple temporalities of space are revealed as contested sites for identity and rights. It is within the everyday that a complex set of spaces, feelings of belonging, and rights to the city can emerge or be challenged”<sup>7</sup>. Hence, it is crucial to understand the functions of these everyday tactics in the public - and also in the private- spaces of the city or in the spaces of work, in order to create an assemblage of experiences and recommendations that could ideally spread and form wider strategies of inclusion with respect to diversity.

Drawing upon these notions and potentials of the city, we try to incorporate them with the common’s experiences both at the local and international level. We worked on the expectation of finding out what was needed in order to engage people in action but also what could be learned from actions already taken. Through this process it would be important for our communities to gain a deeper understanding that “the right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a **common** rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights”<sup>8</sup>.

## Research approach:

Qualitative approaches were implemented throughout this project and mostly approaches that made use of participatory action research. At the same time, we kept in mind that the research process should create and provide space for the women and those involved in the initiatives we worked with to express themselves *naturally*. Our research team created a roadmap of values which were illustrated above.

We followed such an approach because we needed to outline, illustrate and reflect on ideas and notions with subtle underlying assumptions which are difficult to pin down using quantitative measures and indicators. We needed to read between the lines. We needed to let our “*participants*” speak for themselves. We needed to become the medium in order to transfer their values and experiences to the foreground. We needed to reflect on real and existing problems and difficulties rather than create just another set of recommendations. We also felt the need to reflect on these issues for ourselves, i.e. how we, the research team, dealt with similar situations, where did we make mistakes, where did we do well.

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<sup>7</sup> Yasminah Beebeejaun (2017) Gender, urban space, and the right to everyday life, *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 39:3, 323-334, DOI: 10.1080/07352166.2016.1255526

<sup>8</sup> Harvey, D., 2008. The right to the city. *The New Left Review*, 53(Sept/Oct 2008).



So, we tried to work, starting from the individual and then moving on the collective. Of course we could not avoid (neither we wanted to) our personal views (i.e. the research team) coming to the fore as our efforts progressed. The whole research process started shortly after the gE.CO project was lifted off. That was due to the ample time we wanted to give to ourselves and to the workflow we wanted to employ<sup>9</sup>.

Our workflow involved the following steps:

One-to-one in-depth interviews:

We conducted interviews with women working in diverse commons initiatives from October 2019 to April 2020. To engage with this process we visited (pre-COVID19) communities and talked to various women who had different backgrounds and expertise. Their common characteristic was their particularly active presence in the commons scene and in some cases they were also activists.

The women we contacted were involved in the following communities:

- An interdisciplinary research collective with special focus on the commons, [P2P Lab](#).
- A cooperative working on digital technologies, [Sociality](#).
- A solidarity school which provides educational services to under-served children, [Mesopotamia](#).
- A NGO for migrant women which promotes empowerment, communication and active citizenship, [Melissa Network](#).
- A makerspace which promotes co-production and co-design processes in the urban landscape, [Ludd](#).

The interviews apart from some standard demographic and background questions revolved around issues of:

- **Participation.** The issue was discussed in general and then came down to gender views of what participating in a commons community feels like.
- **Decision making.** Through which processes and procedures decisions are made and how they as women feel about inclusion or exclusion.

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<sup>9</sup> Of course as noted elsewhere in this report the COVID19 pandemic formatted and reshaped this approach to a substantial extent.





- **Conflict and dispute management.** How does resolving takes place and whether and how these women dealt with fatigue that resulted from stressful incidents inside their collectives.
- **Recognition.** Whether or not they felt their work and expertise was acknowledged, whether or not attention was paid on their opinions and beliefs.
- **Technology.** How new digital media and tools affected their everyday workflows. Did those means promote or inhibit all the aforementioned aspects (participation, decision making, conflict resolution and recognition). Finally, whether technological proliferation made things easier or more complex for them and why.

### Focus group:

We employed the methodology of a focus group in order to provoke an open discussion among women on the topics that had emerged from our initial theoretical awareness. Moreover, we used the focus-group as a networking tool by bringing together women from various communities and organisations that work in the fields of technological education, gender issues, gender based violence, urban and art and psychological support to young people and parents. This focus-group worked also as a theoretical tool to investigate how participation works by gathering concrete information about existing experiences. One thing we tried to accomplish was building empathy between the participants and the research team and tried to create an experiential common ground. The latter seemed to have increasing value for us as a research team. We also wanted to check the connection between theory and everyday practices and contextualization, as well as the qualitative opinions, attitudes, practices, needs and priorities of these women.



Below the outline of the focus-group is presented.

Participants invited worked in the following groups and public initiatives:



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- [Consultancy Centre for Women - Municipality of Serres](#), a public initiative that deals with violence against women and women's wellbeing in general.
- [Union of Women Association of Heraklion-Crete](#), an NGO that helps women victims of domestic violence.
- [Social Hackers Academy](#), a collective that works in the field of technological education for migrants, unemployed youth and women.
- [Urbana](#), a Civil Non-Profit Partnership, consisting of architects, engineers, and educators which see the city as a field for promoting equality, inclusion and sustainability.
- [Guest House for Women Victims of Violence - Municipality of Kordelio-Evosmos](#), a public initiative which provides shelter to women and children, victims of violence, in a classified and protected guest house.

The title of the focus group was **“Women Visibility and the Promotion of Participation, in general but also during the period of the pandemic”**.

We had prepared a discussion which main focus was on the following subjects:

- Seeing oneself and being seen: how do you think that people see you due to your specific expertise. How do you see yourselves?
- How can we bring to the fore someone's work who is the background?
- What is the role of infrastructure in this procedure?
- Emotional work and embodiment: how can they be brought to the surface?
- Spontaneity, transparency, accountability and empathy: can these ideas be ground to your daily experience and how?
- How does locality influence your work?
- Can feminism and intersectionality be used as a tool for empowerment and enablement?
- What are the levels of acceptance of your work from your community?

The focus on the pandemic revolved around the following axes:

- How did the pandemic affect women's visibility and participation
- How much had the pandemic shifted the activities for the organisations you work for and what are the factors making your job more difficult
- How much did the use of digital tools increase either to connect with beneficiaries or raise awareness and inform the public.
- What were the shortcomings or opportunities of new technological media that surfaced for the respective communities.





Finally, after the discussion we circulated a **follow-up** question that asked from the participants to describe a story of empowerment they had experienced<sup>10</sup>.

### Collective mapping:

Our idea of qualitative mapping tools involved the participation of underrepresented groups in the making of space as well as commons initiatives. Through this process, we tried to build a space for discussion, participation and creation as a starting point that builds a common knowledge of the space that surrounds us. Qualitative maps provide a useful tool for responding to the complexities surrounding issues of spatial scale, boundaries and functionality, and possible differences in definitions of the neighbourhood between individuals depending on their own characteristics (such as gender, class, ethnicity), by offering a means of defining neighbourhood led by residents rather than researchers, but also as a way of better understanding how neighbourhoods are perceived, used and experienced<sup>11</sup>.



Drawing a map is a method of compiling collective accounts of what is common to a group of people who share comparable traits and experiences. Collective maps are a valuable tool for dealing with the complexity of geographic scale, *borders* within a city, and functionality, as well as any definitional variations and thus, they are part of a wider process:

- A “means” for thoughts and collective participation
- Understand spatial mobility of under-represented and socially isolated groups
- Socialization of situated knowledge and good practices
- Co-create safe spaces
- Tool for deep analysis of key issues of visibility and inclusion

<sup>10</sup> The stories the participants shared with us are presented in the Appendix.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander, Cl. (2006) Introduction: Mapping the issues. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 29(3): 397-410



- Document the world of the commons

We held a workshop with five LGBTQI+ community members in order to provoke discussion about how urban space can elevate or degrade participation. The workshop's topic was "Experiences and Perceptions of the City," and our goal was to construct a collective map that visualized a spatially recorded field of collective memory. We began by briefly outlining the workshop's objectives and explaining the communal mapping process to the attendees. Following that, the participants introduced themselves and were given the opportunity to ask additional questions about the mapping process. While exchanging thoughts and happenings with the other participants, individuals were free to use markers and draw symbols on rice paper to identify places and zones that reflected their own experiences. We asked each person to include an aspect from his or her personal experience in space that reflected community-based activities such as LGBTQI+ rights campaigns and organizations. At that moment, participants became more engaged with the activity as a collaborative process of sharing the spatial knowledge developed. Throughout the workshop, we used a series of questions to encourage participants to recollect zones, locations, routes, places, and anything else that they enjoy or, on the other hand, find distressing and uncomfortable. The following key axes and sub-questions dominated the discussion:

- **The meaning of 'safe space'**

An introductory section where participants were encouraged to share their interpretation of 'safe space' and how this could relate to participation in an urban context.

- **The neighbourhood experience**

At this point, participants were invited to assess their sense of "safety" in their neighbourhoods, using a 5-point rating scale, and mark on the map areas and zones that used to have and/or still having an impact on their state of emotions:

- Where do you live?
- What is the level of acceptance of your identity as a member of the LGBTQI+ community in your neighbourhood? (0/5)
- How do you experience the way people from the neighbourhood see you as a member of the community?
- Was there an incident in which you felt that your 'right to the city' was being questioned?

- **The city experience**

Here, we attempt to expand our understanding of spatial representation and participation of the community, and so, we asked the participants to start thinking from the level of their neighborhood to the scale of the city:

- Which areas of the city do you visit the most often when alone? Which ones with your friends and for what reasons?
- Which are the areas of the city that you visit the least, the areas that "bother" you? For what reasons?



- Could you share with us events or experiences of acceptance that you experienced? In which areas did they unfold? What were the reactions of the people who were there and to what extent did these experiences change your perception of the city?

- **The 'common' experience**

All groups of questions that were unfolded above, aimed at the better understanding of the spatial dimension of acceptance of this underrepresented social group. In the last section, we tried to disclose issues of participation and inequality

- Do you know any organizations, institutions and/or community-based initiatives within the city that promote issues of integration and acceptance? If so, how do they affect your daily experiences in the city and in what way?
- Have you lived in other cities? What was the level of acceptance you experienced there and what was the activity of the respective communities, if any?
- How does locality (in relation to the space but also culturally) change the way you participate and act in your daily life? How crucial is it?

Finally, we asked the participants to draw freely any additional information that they considered important to share.

### Participatory actions:

- a. During the development of the project we tried to create a network with commons communities in Athens. Apart from bringing gE.CO closer to local communities we decided to get involved more actively with some of them. Using our expertise in digital infrastructuring we work with a womens' community helping them build their digital infrastructure.

The community we worked with was a network of migrant women based in downtown Athens called [Melissa](#).

The action involved working with the personnel of the community and helping them create an infrastructure for their internal organisation and an educational tool that would help them reach out to their beneficiaries during the COVID19 pandemic when social distancing measures were in effect.

These actions were used to deduce how these communities work internally, what their intrinsic needs were and how digital infrastructuring could help promote participation and visibility of work or impede these functions.

- b. Exploitation of an engagement and raise awareness tool developed for the H2020 CO3 project. The board game "12 commons Buildings" was developed as a supportive tool to engage future users in the pilot implementation of the service "Mapping community needs on empty buildings". This is an Augmented Reality application which tries to give an active role to citizens in proposing uses that they feel are needed in the



neighborhoods of Athens. The design and development of the game was greatly inspired and influenced by our involvement in ge.CO living lab. Thus, we decided to design a workshop in the public space of Fokionos Negri (Kypseli, Athens) during the actions of “What do we have in common?”, a one-day festival organized by **Ludd Lab** and **Goethe Institut of Athens**. The workshop took place on 10th of July 2021 and members of cooperatives and commons’ initiative along with citizens who responded to our open call participated.



The process of the workshop and the characteristics of role-play competitive board game designated the potentials of a game environment not only to raise awareness and educate about issues of urban space and right to the city, but also to generate a common ground of discussion about visions, dreams and problematics for our neighborhoods among people who were strangers to each other.

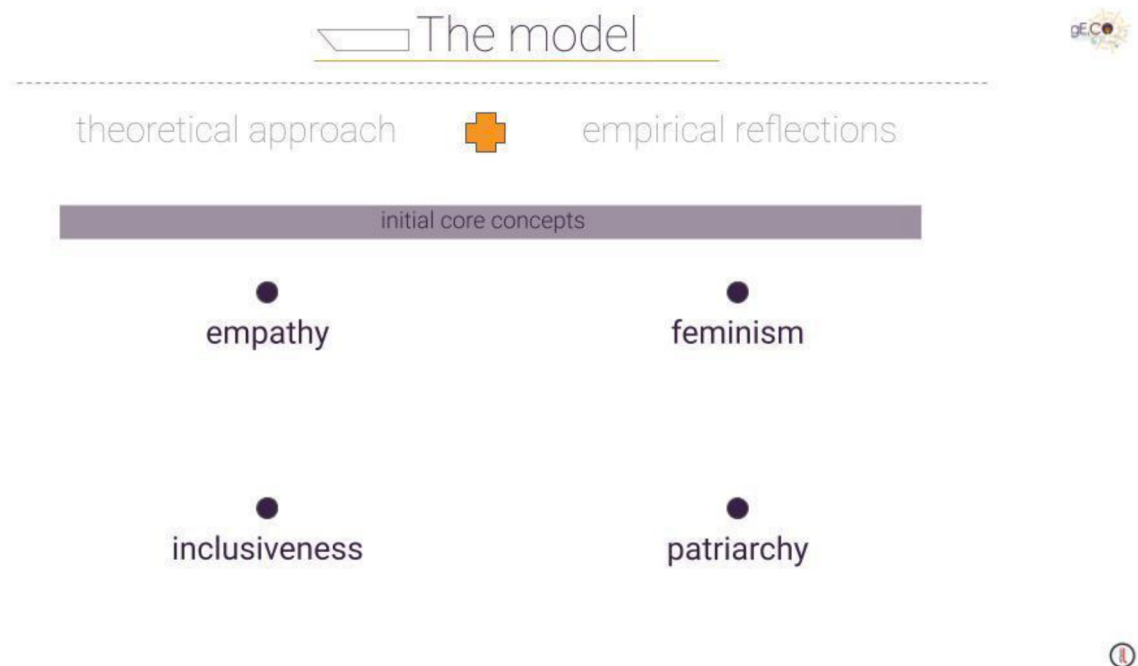


## The participatory model - A strategy:

We iterated on data that were accumulated from both the in-depth interviews, the focus group and collective mapping. These data were then read again through the lens of the notes we had created from the participatory actions. The data used to create the strategy for the participatory model for women and under-represented groups was divided into two instances. One that captures the initial core concepts that emerged from our theoretical approach and the empirical reflections. The other instance is the one that refers to the specific aspects of the participatory model. The aspects which the strategy for a holistic bottom up approach needs to refer to, in order to increase visibility and participation of the aforementioned groups.

### Initial core concepts:

- Empathy:
- Inclusiveness:
- Feminism:
- Patriarchy:



These concepts surfaced both from our theoretical perspective and at the same time from our empirical reflections. The participatory model we propose has to address the first three values



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and finally acknowledge the wider context into which people are living in and social interactions take place.

The model has to take into account these general four concepts. It has to be empathetic and open to diverse and heterogeneous cultures and groups of people. The model has to introduce inclusiveness as central component and must rely on feminist thought in order to allow for people that are traditionally misrepresented, underserved and excluded to have a voice inside the commons communities and beyond.

Finally, it is essential that patriarchy and capitalism has to be recognised and appreciated as the underlying subtext upon which contemporary discriminations take place especially for the groups of people this research is referring to. It is fruitful to use patriarchy -as an analytical theoretical category- in order to distinguish, reveal and understand discriminations that happen based on identity, sexual orientation and gender; while a critique on capitalist relations on the other hand provides a lens through which we can distinguish discriminations based on social class, income, ethnicity and due to social status and social capital.



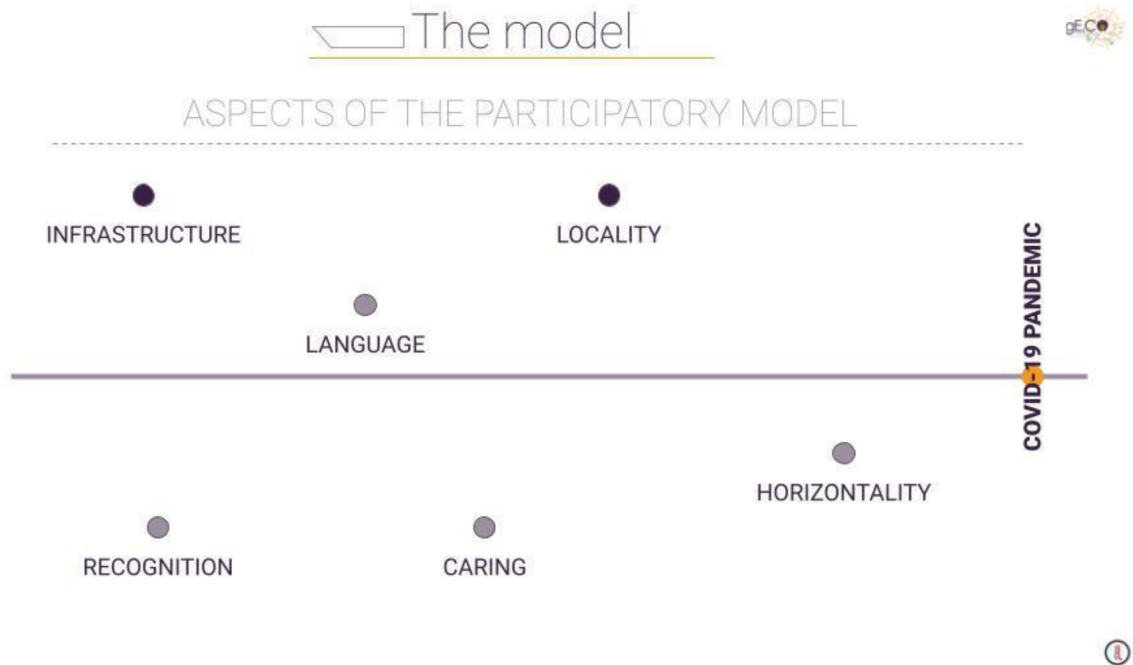


## Aspects of a strategy for participation:

The recommendations we propose here are trying to shape a participatory model based in the aforementioned categories.

Below we are presenting the categories and elaborate on these with material from our data. We propose a participatory model that encompasses the following categories that emerged from our research as a means of increasing visibility and participation for women and other underrepresented groups (for example LGBTQi+).

- Infrastructure and digital tools
- Locality
- Visibility
- Caring
- Horizontality
- Language
- COVID19 pandemic



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### Infrastructure:

Infrastructure plays and digital tools play an important role for participation and visibility of work and other instances inside commons initiatives. The communities we worked with made extensive use of digital tools but at the same time acknowledged their shortcomings. On the one hand more tech-skilled groups had a better and more effective penetration and reaching out due to better use of digital means, while those who worked in public initiatives had problems with equipment and they were ponderous. The latter in many cases suffer from inadequate funding resources and therefore they cannot provide their staff with the necessary tools to work with.

This situation has resulted in a diffused feeling of inadequacy for the women working in those initiatives. Because in a world that's depended on digital means to perform elaborate and mundane everyday tasks, lack of access to these tools mean deprivation in various circumstances.

For the women we talked to, digital tools helped communications and job seeking. On several occasions they used crowdfunding services in order to solve everyday needs for communities or their respective organisations. Moreover, such tools were used as a means for raising awareness. Most of these communities used for example FaceBook for campaigning. These tools provided the ability to be in constant connection with the communities they work with.

Hence, lack of access to such infrastructure prevents women from being able to connect, do their job properly and feel contempt with the quality of services they provide their organisation or community. However, attention needs to be given to latent side effects of the use of digital tools. For many organisations and communities reaching out became more depersonalised and the women could assess the real effect of their actions. Also, a lot of the women we talked to suffered from digital fatigue (ie. zoom fatigue, being tired from doing lengthy online meetings, that have a small effect on daily work routines).

### Locality:

Locality is being used with several meanings that pertain to relationships that have to do with space. How these relations foster or inhibit participation, how the social context inside which a community has to operate is an important factor for acceptance and visibility. For example the women we spoke to were coming from various places in Greece. Some of them from more rural parts of the country others from bigger and more metropolitan cities.



All of them agreed, though based on different points of view, to the fact that *homogeneity* of population makes it more difficult to accept what is different and not inline with the normative state of things. Multiculturalism, pluralism and otherness proved to be more helpful. These traits help with diversifying the space in which their actions are deployed. They often come across *stereotypes* concerning their work and their status. For example, women who work in a community for women survivors of domestic violence, told us that in their city they are called “The abused women”. This is something that other women in our focus group seemed to identify with. Moreover, those who worked in safe-houses for women talked about secrecy and how important it is for their work. Secrecy can be jeopardised if the levels of cooperation and acceptance from the local communities are low.

So, many of them proposed a multi-faceted action against stereotypes and institutional stigmatization. They argued that having a decent job and proper education is a means of empowerment for women and local communities as well. They noted that cooperation with academic institutes can create a fertile subtext for acceptance by creating a safer space of expression on a local level. They stressed out the success of solidarity actions (food sharing practices, etc) mostly on neighborhood levels means that there is a strong presence of grassroots collectives which are essential to opening bridges with local communities creating a sound basis for *dialogue* among the two. These were also actions that led to a shift in the operation of local public authorities and institutions which became susceptible to their work but also to bottom up approaches such as co-design methodological approaches in service design and application.

### Recognition:

Recognition and attribution of one's work and efforts is very much tightly connected to visibility and how participation can be diffused and democratised. When the work that someone does is acknowledged from the immediate circle and the larger environment they live and act in, then they feel content and draw meaning out of it.

*"If you do what's good you seem pretty, good and nice to them"* [social worker]

The women felt good when they believed that what they did had meaning and was helpful. This was realised when they had freedom to act, when they had a say. In their own words: “*when you are accepted - when you are free to shape your work*”. From that standpoint they drew the satisfaction of discovery. When they felt they were able to devote time to their work they felt safe and expressive.

Recognition for them went hand in hand with the fact that they had their voices heard, something that promoted the levels of their self-esteem. One the other hand, most of the



women who took part in our research and were working in public initiatives, expresses that one major factor which diminishes the levels of recognition they feel they get in their workplaces, has to do with delays in payment and contract renewals, as well as the absence of days of leave from their posts. These actions felt like devaluation of efforts made by them and the work they did and fed into a constant feel of burn-out.

#### Caring:

Caring is something that almost all the women we talked and worked with had noticed more or less explicitly. Caring is being acknowledged as a set of actions that for the most part feminised. Often it goes unnoticed to such a degree that presents women with various consequences that lead to inequalities for example in their pay or their social status. In order to overcome these shortcomings communities need to bring to the foreground, acknowledge the work being done and the care that comes with it. By doing so, caring becomes a means for enabling and not a burden.

The women noted that caring and empathy opens a window to dialogue and therefore to offering. The ways to facilitate the aforementioned process is to work in a transparent manner in all levels, a mode of conduct that can ensure equality and participation. This when dialogue can evolve as an internal process in communities (or places of work for that matter) and as a prerequisite for the development of cooperation. Such subtle underpinnings are the elements of caring as an intervention on which field workers and activists can evolve as one of our interviews noted.

Caring is an action which gives away the interdependent nature of people. It has to do with caring for others, being cared for by others and caring about oneself. Therefore participation can be shaped in such a way that women, LGBTQi people, migrants that through caring, the reflexive and relational aspects of community building become apparent and the importance of caring is appreciated.

#### Language:

*How we speak, the language we use reflects the kind of societies that we live in and provides a framework, a lens through which we are viewing each other. Therefore it is very important to re-shape language.* [social worker]

Many of our respondents and participants paid very much attention to the importance of language. There is a fundamental difference between Greek<sup>12</sup>, other European languages<sup>13</sup> and

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<sup>12</sup> The language primarily used by the people we worked with.

<sup>13</sup> Such as German and French for example.



English in the way genders are represented. That's why most of the people we talked with were really concerned about certain aspects of language use. For instance, the use of pronouns is an important differentiation. In Greek all adjectives have gender determined suffixes. So, as it is obvious most of the time there is an inadvertent preference to use the male suffixes.

When someone refers to a crowd of people consisting both of women and men most of the time he or she uses the male suffixes. This was duly noted by the women we talked to and they thought that one should always try to use pronouns that reflect the precise composition of the group. By employing such a strategy for language, women and girls are given the attention they deserve and stand out without becoming merged under one gender category which most of the time is the male category.

Moreover the importance of language was highlighted by the women that worked with migrant communities, as a means of connection, as a way to provide a sound basis for positively mixing cultural elements. For them, the use of the English language -when that was feasible- was a medium to achieve just that, the *bridging* and the *proximity* between diverse cultural elements. So, in societal settings that mostly consist of people with different cultural experiences, the use of a language in a proper manner is crucial for creating a layer, a net on which everyone can feel included and part of a community.

#### Horizontality:

Horizontality has to do with the lack of apparent hierarchies and stereotype dualisms in commons' communities. For the people we worked with, one important aspect that inhibits equality in participation and therefore, in everyday situations is the absence of awareness which builds upon a shortfall of proper information on issues of equality and inclusion. Here the importance of education in these matters is accentuated in order to diminish the various ways representation of under-served social groups remains unnoticed and thus resulting in a closure of the field of participation for them.

Being informed and educated on such problems and complications can help communities understand everyday sexism and discrimination that happens inadvertently, allowing for *hierarchies* and unnecessary *dualisms* to rise. What is important here is to create the appropriate space for everyone to be able to take equally and democratically part in the everyday decision making processes of each community.

Although noted elsewhere, one more aspect that elevates participation and nurtures equal representation and contribution inside commons communities has to do with the *transparent* manner of doing things inside a community. Being open and clear gives the opportunity to



people working in the background to step forward, get their work appreciated and therefore leading to more porous communities and institutions.

### COVID19 pandemic:

The COVID19 pandemic had a great impact on our research approach and at the same time affected -as it is more than obvious- the way people went about their daily routines, how people in communities communicated with each other, and how everyday interactions took place. We tried to include the pandemic's effects on everyday life to the strategy we are proposing here as an outlier, an extreme case that had a substantial impact on participation, visibility, proximity and perceptions of otherness and space. Moreover, the pandemic shifted significantly either positive or negative all the aforementioned aspects that influence participation.

The COVID19 pandemic according to the people we worked with had both a positive and negative impact on them and their communities. A lot of reconfigurations and readjustments in their daily workflows had to take place and innovative thinking had to be employed. For example the women that worked in communities which dealt with domestic violence and gender equality came across contradictions such as the fact that most of the women they had to serve were obliged to remain at home with potential perpetrators. For these communities spontaneity and creativity became "compulsory" as they put it. Moreover, working from home did not nurture proximity or the development and expansion of intimate relationships between those who work together and between staff and their beneficiaries. Something which is absolutely necessary for the elaboration of caring practices.

At the same time, the pandemic had influenced how people think about infrastructure and especially digital software and hardware. For instance, during the months of quarantine, there was a reduction of people visiting either public institutions or common's communities. This trend was the opposite of what had been experienced in the past. This shift resulted in a diffusion of interventions through phones giving a rise in the use of smartphones and new digital media.

In cases where physical and digital infrastructure was lacking or technological fluency was missing, all procedures and interventions were hard to be accomplished. Moreover, such a shift towards digital media presented communities with issues that might have never occurred in the past. The most prominent of these was the rise in concerns around issues of security & privacy of online presence. For many communities such issues were totally new and most of the time were discouraging and restricting.





On the other hand, there were instances where the field of actions for some communities was expanded beyond the strict geographical limits that were in effect before the pandemic broke out. For them the proliferation of digital means was something that boosted their reach. Of course we have to note here that these communities were either very tech-savvy or were very keen on adopting and using digital tools. For such communities online platforms (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.) and digital tools were used as a means to raise awareness, sustain a community, or even try to build a new one.

Another side-effect noted by the people interviewed had to do with public space as a field of action. Communities which conceived public space as their preferential locus of intervention were confronted with excessive difficulties because public space was ruled out for them. Not only when acting and intervening but also being outside became illegal in many circumstances. Therefore the amount of operations was considerably reduced as the area of activity (locus) had to narrow down. Hence, actions became more specific and less proliferated than before.



## Final remarks:

In the paragraphs above we tried to sketch what a participatory model for women and under-represented groups would look like after taking into consideration their thoughts, aspirations and feelings on the subject. We employed several and different methodological tools in order to reach our goal. Lessons learned from this research effort extend also to other areas and realities that do not necessarily fall into the categories of participation and visibility. These lessons were also not definite and final but opened more questions that pertain to the subject of commoning. The ideas that came up after analysing the data these people provided us with, pushed us kindly towards more reflexive accounts on how we could research and what such efforts mean in the context of everyday interactions.

We dwelled upon some of the following questions:

- ★ Did we manage to give voice to the people that helped us during the months of the research?
- ★ Did we truly shed light on the issues that were more pressing to them and differed substantially from the initial motivation of this research project?
- ★ Did our research questions matched at any degree those everyday aspects that matter to these communities the most?

And the most pressing of all questions: *Did we have the mental and sentimental capacity to reflect what these women & members of LGBTQI+ communities shared with us ?*

The answers to these questions are elusive and do not seem fixed. However, all these months provided us with the opportunity and ability to come closer to these communities, try to find our place as researchers among them. We tried to work on our tools and shift them accordingly. The participatory actions and workshops we did provided us with invaluable insights on the role of experience and expression from the point of view of gender and identity.

If we try honestly to reflect on our experience, we have to admit that we partially - or not at all- achieved to address these issues. It's a matter of time and commitment to gain trust among these communities and in terms of a research project it is impossible to leave out the identity of those who conducted the research. Hence, the most important shift in our research assumptions was that while trying to form a participatory model for these communities, we realized that the crucial point is not in the direction of "engaging the other" in order to participate and become visible, but which could be the processes of "becoming the other" and employing such a way we minimize the distance from *others*. In this realm, we acknowledge that this model could mainly have a transformative impact on those who work and interact with these communities and ideally help to create ruptures in the dominant norms and beliefs.





As a final remark, we would like to point out that this part of our research project was run mostly (but not exclusively) by white *cis* men. So, the answer to the last question we posed will probably remain open for the most part and cannot be answered by us. Despite having employed feminist thought and interdisciplinary approaches that helped us see and examine gender issues through different and multiple analytical lenses by letting multiple dimensions of identity open up the field of visibility, we must acknowledge the fact that our privileges, however sceptical we may be about them, must be somehow subject to criticism. It's our standpoint, one that remains to be tested daily in our everyday practices, that we can manage through claim and collective-work, the creation and fostering of communities with specific interests which revolve around gender equality, emancipation and empowerment by opening the possibilities of agency. Then perhaps we may change the way we see and make society through expanding and nurturing participation.



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## Appendix:

Stories of *empowerment*. Shared by the women who attended the focus-group on visibility and participation.

1. Every time a woman makes a step further from abuse, it's an experience of empowerment for her as it is for me as well. Especially when a young woman managed to leave an abusive environment and that happened with the aid of various services, while we also succeeded in raising awareness of the juridical system. This experience had an empowering effect on staff, on a personal and professional level pointing out the possibilities that exist to overcome social misconceptions and stereotypes.
2. A fairly recent, pre-covid, collective experience of empowerment that even today fills me with courage is self-organised action that took place in our city, at a central location, having as a motto the Chilean "the rapist is you". The fact that the action happened without prior notice and without anyone expecting it and the feminist demonstration that followed made me feel very empowered and contributed a lot to how we become visible in public space. Moreover, the comments we received as shown on the videos of the day present clearly how annoying the action was to certain people, therefore I can say, I was further made happy.
3. As far as my story is concerned I would like to describe the process that led me towards empowerment. Since 2010 I have been an active member of seminars in Greece and the EU during which experiential knowledge is gained through making/constructing and belonging to a collective where everyone can offer their prior knowledge and experiences. By creating new things knowledge turns into precious experience, the dynamics of which expands my horizons, inspiring and empowering me to keep on with my research, to create new things which will improve people's everyday lives. During these seminars which combined experience, practical exercise and making, I always enjoyed belonging in a team and tried to cooperate as best as I could. Through cooperation a field is created within which a team can be made complete and successful. Moreover, working for a social and educational role is something very empowering, because you can see that you can offer things and at the same time shape them along with the community. Moreover, the experience through interactive workshops with children is an extremely dynamic process which expands my horizons and leads my studies and plans towards the fulfillment of their dreams.



4. An experience of empowerment is for me to attend the monthly meetings of the Society for the Protection of Minors where people and institutions from Thessaloniki and the wider area of central Macedonia participate. These meetings have to do with monitoring and networking and they have a truly enhancing and helpful effect on me and my job.

