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WORKSHOP

Working towards eco-social futures can, of itself, be inspiration for finding new perspectives and developing worlds in which "creaturely" ways of being and doing bring a gentler, more connected approach and artificial lines between humans and nature are no longer drawn.

CreaTures (Creative Practices for Transformational Futures) was a 3-year EU project investigating the potential of creative practices in art, design, and related cultural fields to support positive eco-social change. The project sought more nourishing ways of living and being together on our shared planet. The CreaTures Framework is an outcome of this co-created research, setting out how creative practices can stimulate action towards these, more liveable, futures.

Find out more at: https://creatures-eu.org
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EVALUATION

Evaluating creative practice

Evaluation may be the gatekeeper to funds and reputation, but it is not independent of the prevailing culture or the tools of measurement. Some key considerations when evaluating the role of creative practice in stimulating action are that:

- transformative societal change does not fit within single projects;
- unexpected outcomes are valuable;
- evaluations are about power and meaning-making;
- evaluation is creative, and should be recognised as such;
- creative practices can subvert existing societal processes;
- safety is needed for learning.

Creative policy makers and funders use evaluation, agenda setting and impact thinking as leverage points for change.

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Safety is needed for learning

Organizations in the culture sector (and beyond) experience a profound lack of safety that does not allow them to investigate honestly whether projects and processes have succeeded or failed. Evaluation, then, becomes more about advocacy and defence than learning. Creating a safe environment that enables learning is crucial, especially in the context of societal transformations, which bring significant uncertainties and instabilities. This can include the following questions:

- How do we make sure evaluation doesn't destroy learning opportunities?
- How do we actively support learning?

Creative policy makers and funders use evaluation, agenda setting and impact thinking as leverage points for change.

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Creative practices can *subvert existing processes*

Much about our current realities is fundamentally destructive and counter to a more sustainable future. Evaluations often focus on how to improve things and make new processes and actions work. But from the perspective of societal transformations, there should be a stronger focus on how creative practices help subvert, disrupt and unmake damaging elements of our worlds. This requires a different way of thinking that keeps track of which parts of existing realities have a higher chance of being unmade through the impact of creative practices. Attention should be given to:

- **How do we create evaluations that actively stimulate the dismantling of current, destructive systems?**

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Evaluation
is creative

When we set out what success and failure look like for creative practices, we are operating in a design mode. We are either explicitly or implicitly imagining the parameters of the future we want, even if that future is still rather open. But the contexts which provide these parameters, and therefore frame our future imaginaries, are not stable – they are themselves transforming rapidly. Questions here can focus on:

- How do our ideas about what change we want to see, and how we get there, relate to this awareness of a changing world?
- What are dominant fears of/for the future?
- How do we tell our stories well?

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Evaluations are about *power and meaning-making*

Rather than being neutral, evaluations are shaped by processes of dialogue, rhetoric, power and meaning-making and involve many different people and organizations. All of these use ideas, evidence and stories as rhetoric to support their positions, secure funding and frame policy action. So analysis can include consideration of:

- What are the power dynamics inherent in what is valued?
- Who gets to determine who the major stakeholders are?
- What are the ethical questions involved?

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Unexpected outcomes are *valuable*

Societal transformations, whether good or bad from our perspective, are unpredictable and often require new ways of seeing and acting. Creative practices are effective at facilitating novel perspectives and creating unpredictable results in the form of new initiatives, new connections between people, and more. Questions here can include:

- How do we create space for unexpected outcomes?
- How can theories of change support evaluations that are flexible and adaptive?
- How can evaluations be responsive to the many directions of the unexpected?

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transformative change does *not fit within single projects*

Evaluations of creative practices are often focused on linear, short-term results and project-level reporting. This does little to gain insight into the links between creative practices and societal transformations. Evaluations need to take a wider view, based on the understanding that societal transformations often happen because many groups, projects and organizations are acting to create change in different ways. Contexts are important. Collaborations between different groups – funders, policy makers, artists, academics – are needed, and should develop in a way that provides real structural support for system-level questions. Attention can address:

- What can we learn about the impacts of creative practitioners as they go from one project to the next?
- What is the impact across many different projects engaging with the same challenge or societal issue?
- What are the impacts of large-scale programs, policies and strategies?

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DIMENSIONS

Nine dimensions *of creative practice*

CreaTures research was co-created by academic and creative practitioners. Together they identified a range of qualities that can combine to produce powerful effects and affect – through playful encounters and socially-engaged activities stressing experience and reflection. This chart shows the qualities and how they were understood to influence, as a basis for understanding dimensions for designing or evaluating material.

Changing meanings	Changing connections	Changing power
Embodying	*Caring*	*Co-creating*
Learning	*Organizing*	*Empowering*
Imagining	*Inspiring*	*Subverting*

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Potential *methods*

- Ethnography, participant observation: observing participant activities and expressions during engagement

- Participant focus groups and reflection sessions, debriefs

- Participant interviews – before, after, sometime after engagement

- Interviews with peers, creators and others influenced

- Analysis of artifacts, documents, texts, visuals, performances, social media – key metaphors, discourse, narrative structure

- Evidence of others referring to the practice in (social) media

- Relationship and network mapping, as a cross-section or over time

- Analysis of changes in policies, strategies and governance arrangements

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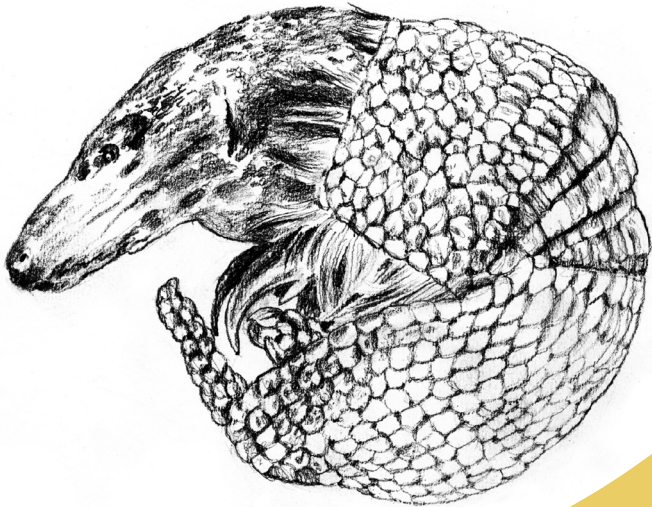
Embodying

(changing meaning)

Creative practices may focus on new
ways of embodying, which allows people
– individually and together - to tap into the
full intelligence of the body and the senses,
and engage with the full complexity of life
and its different realities first-hand.

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Embodying

- What values about what the world is and what it should be does the embodiment represent? What values are missing?

- Who gets to participate in the embodiment? Who does not? Why?

- What bodily experiences and experiential worlds are being made available? Which ones are not present but maybe should be? What about those of other species?

- Is there evidence that embodiment has signficantly helped people access more diverse ways of being and knowing and in a way that has changed their lives?

- Is there evidence that embodiment has provided people with more emotional energy in a longer-term sense?
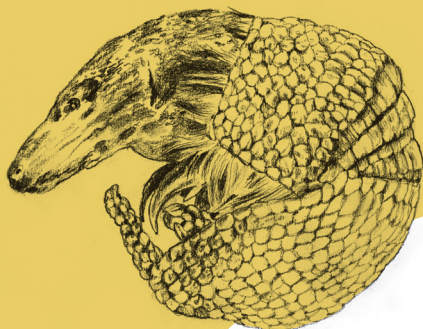
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Learning
(changing meaning)

Creative practices offer unique opportunities for learning. Assumptions and worldviews can be questioned through creative practice; new ways of seeing, being and doing can be learned. Learning can involve reasoning, experimenting and acquiring new skills at the same time.

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Learning

- What values underlie the new things people are learning?

- Who is able to participate in the learning, and if relevant, the teaching? Who does not? Why?

- Whose knowledge is being made accessible? Whose knowledge is not made accessible? Why?

- How might the individual and/or collective learning change people on the longer term?

- Is the learning likely to lead to new individual and/or collective skills and capabilities?

- Are all these learnings knowledge-based or are different types of learning encouraged?

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Imagining
(changing meaning)

Creative practices can help in imagining different futures in ways that can be vivid, emotionally resonant and challenging. Imagination is a component in all change actions, anticipating possibilities and bringing them closer to enactment.

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Imagining

- Who is represented in the stories and images that are engaged with, either as creators or as characters/perspectives? Who is not represented?

- How do these new images or stories relate to existing societal imaginations of the future, present or past? What values underpin these imaginations?

- Do the images and stories challenge existing societal imaginations or re-articulate existing but alternative imaginations? To what extent do they represent something entirely new?

- Are there indications that new images or stories might gain more collective and/or institutional support?

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Caring
(changing connections)

New ways of caring for each other
and the world open up the safety,
support and empathy needed for
better futures, as well as providing
the energy and courage to work
toward them together.

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Caring

- Who is being cared for? Who is doing the caring? Who is not being cared for but maybe should be? Who should be doing the caring?

- How does the creative practice offer specific engagements with care that would otherwise not be possible outside this practice?

- How are experiences of caring and being cared for expected to open people's perspectives on the political possibilities that caring creates?

- Are there indications that the forms of care in this creative practice might become more widespread?

- What is "cared for" and what is "cared about"?

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Organizing
(changing connections)

Creative practices can stimulate new ways of
organizing, leading to new communities, networks
and support structures that can help create
change, facilitating different interests to come
together and find common ground, and producing
spaces and structures that help align agendas.

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Organizing

- Who is involved in the engagement or creation of shared symbols and representations of emotions, values, intentions and concepts that might form the basis for organization?

- Do the shared symbols and representations that may form the basis for organization persist over time?

- What is unique about this creative practice in terms of its ability to facilitate social organization?

- Is there evidence of new networks, collaborations or organizations emerging as a result of the creative practice?

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inspiring
(changing connections)

Creative practices can be core
to inspiring action well beyond
immediate interactions, providing
energy, ideas and examples and
demonstrating how they can be
taken forward.

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Inspiring

- Who is involved in the spreading of inspiration? Whose ideas, images, stories, methods are being spread and amplified? Who is not part of the process but maybe should be?

- Does the spreading of inspiration lead to concretely changed practices and action and by what means?

- Is anything important lost in the inspiration of practices by others? Does the practice get absorbed by mainstream systems or does it change mainstream systems in a meaningful way?

- What is unique about this creative practice that allows it to inspire and spread?

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Co-creating
(changing power)

Through the co-creating of ideas, processes,
goals and outcomes, people can harness
the power of creative practice to imagine
new futures together; to learn new skills,
to understand each other's perspectives,
to define problems, and more.

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Co-creating

- Do the co-creative aspects increase the emancipatory character of the creative practice? In what ways does it fall short in this regard?

- To what extent are ideas, processes, outcomes and goals all being co-created? Which parts of activities are open for greater involvement?

- Whose perspectives are included and not included?

- Do the co-creative aspects improve the insights and knowledge created through the creative practice?

- Do the co-creative aspects increase the possibility of stimulating real action?

- Has the co-creative process led to new connections among people?

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Empowering

(changing power)

Creative practices can be empowering, raising and strengthening voices and perspectives in systems that normally have no space for them. People and groups can test positions, find new sources of agency and feel new power.

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Empowering

- Whose perspectives, experiences, concerns and ways of being are being empowered through the creative practice? Who is not included but maybe should be? What about other species?

- Is there evidence that more individuals and organizations, the media and powerful institutions are adopting and mobilizing symbols, languages and ideas that were previously marginalized or disempowered?

- Are resources being mobilized to support marginalized people and groups?

- Does the creative practice connect to any windows of possibility – key events in wider society that offer opportunities for change?

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Subverting

(changing power)

Since it is not enough to build new systems
(and many current systems need dismantling),
creative practices can also be used for subverting,
symbolically and practically, those broken systems
and ways of doing things that have to be replaced.
Subverting can hold a hint of what might be better,
while reminding that things can be changed.

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Subverting

- Whose realities, activities, views are being subverted? Who is doing the subverting? Is there harm possible in terms of who is subverting and being subverted?

- Do any conflicts arise? What are the conflicting positions?

- Do activities come out of the engagement that are likely to subvert current systems?

- Do subversive ideas, metaphors, images and other elements of the creative practice resonate with wider societal contexts - in the media, public discourse?

- Is there any evidence of actual change to systems sometime after the creative practice has begun/ended?

- To what extent are new ideas born from the activity of subverting old ones?

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TRANSFORMATIONS

Transformative creative practice

Creative practice can make the conditions for cultural change to emerge, supporting humanity in the urgent task of shifting cultures towards sustainability. As transformative creative practitioners working in and with communities:

- we act together;
- we stress the experiential;
- we look forward;
- we are reflexive and reflective;
- we build agency for change.

Beyond carbon saved, we offer hearts and minds changed and worlds re-envisioned, from the personal to the global.

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We act
together

We create work that brings people together with others in a place or locality. We bring people together in cultural or communal spaces to find new significance in the world and build connections, while working to make such spaces safe for honesty and sharing.

We explore the qualities of culture - experiential, exploratory, immersive, connective, thought-(and- feeling-) provoking – to make opportunity for encounter with something outside ourselves and to encounter ourselves AND ourselves in relation to others, including other life forms and other ways of being. We learn about difference; we accept surprise; we lay foundations for trust in unexpected places.

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We stress the *experiential*

We create sensory experiences, using playfulness and making as central components. We make links between the here-and-now and the remote, complex and emergent systems that are affecting us all. We invite/prompt more-than-rational senses and responses, including those that engage with emotions and we find paths for those emotions towards active hope. We communicate abstract concepts well.

We critique current ways of life (by surfacing contradictions or defamiliarizing the everyday) and destabilize norms, particularly when our practices are aggregated. We make room to explore political, moral or ethical concerns and do not force solutions. We experiment, seek our way and share the journey so that we grow and change with our partners and participants.

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We are *reflexive and reflective*

We create support for people to move from recognizing serious issues to acting for change. We share and reflect on our own and others' experiences, grounding them in everyday life and thinking realistically about capacity and capabilities. We know that careful and skillful facilitation is needed.

We offer opportunities to reflect, to make sense of experience in one's own terms, and hear the same (or different) from others. We establish space to explore and understand what matters to each person and why – to engage with different responses and perspectives.

We make time and place for individuals to reflect *together* on:

- Other people's views and how they might differ from or complement our own impressions;
- Our own thought processes and what we value;
- How this relates to our worlds and what is salient to take away/act on;
- What it might mean/require in terms of change;
- Who we might want to collaborate with – become friends and allies with.

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We build agency *for change*

We create conditions to enhance people's sense of agency, rather than focusing on education or facts. We know that being told or shown doesn't engage individual or collective agency; it merely informs.

We contribute to creating a sense of agency by:

- Understanding the future is made not found;
- Sensing through imagination and/or immersive, experiential activity how a different future might feel;
- Reflecting with other people, particularly those who fuel our desire for better;
- Discovering that others hold values similar to ours.

We realize that the act of exploring positive, practical possibilities may, in itself, help people to find new meaning, feel more connected and experience greater agency.

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We look *forward*

We create opportunities/encounters oriented towards positive futures: imaginative, generative, prefigurative, anticipatory, speculative, and hopeful, which:

- prompt people to imagine;
- ignite new possibilities and dissolve limiting assumptions (generative);
- invite people to experience how the future could be (prefigurative);
- help people to understand how the future is influenced by the present (anticipatory);
- encourage people to think about possible futures (speculative).

We heed the words of John Schaar: *'The future is not some place we are going, but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found, but made. And the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination.'*

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