

Islands of Community



Toolbox on organising workshops
on small islands

Created by the Association Tatavaka
and their Associates on project DROPS



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1. Introduction

'Islands of Community — Toolbox on organising workshops on small islands' was created as one of the outputs of the project DROPS — *Design And Re-engagement of Public Water Sources on The Island of Zlarin* carried out by association Tativaka, in partnership with *Zlarin Tourist Board* and the *City of Šibenik*.

The main objective of the DROPS project was re-valorization of water systems and the water basin on the Island through community engagement achieved by knowledge sharing of water use sustainable models between residents, students, civil society stakeholders and experts, through a participatory workshop process and expert lectures from the perspectives of urban planning, biodiversity, cultural landscape, folk customs, and others. In addition to the workshops, a clean-up action was organized, as well as the installation of thematically relevant works of art and a public faucet which ensures available drinking water for all residents and visitors of Zlarin.

The idea of creating the toolbox for coordination of the workshops using the principles of sociocracy was established in the process of planning the project, but during the execution of the project we came to realize that there is a lot more to be shared in this toolbox, other than just the coordination of workshops. Mainly, we decided to add one more chapter which would give an insight to the challenges of planning the workshops in small insular communities. Furthermore, the decision was made to create distinctive chapters regarding the research workshop and land art workshop, rather than just one that speaks about the workshops in general. The reason behind this decision was, that during the progress of the workshops, different approaches were used based upon the nature of the workshop objectives.

We hope this toolbox will serve as a guide for small insular communities which have an urge to develop projects in their own local communities.



2. Challenges of insular isolation

Because of their specific position in the environment and in contrast to the mainland, life on islands has always been determined by the lack of resources in general. In the context of everyday island life in contemporary times, these deficiencies have been surpassed — more or less. In this chapter we will cover the main difficulties of organising a workshop in a insular environment and offer tools on how to handle them.

Community

During our research on traditional usage of water on the island (which has always been a lacking resource) our informants — the locals of the island of older generations, emphasized the importance of collectives. Most of them shared with us that, when you live on an island, you must take care of each other, as you also depend on each other. This leads to island local communities being very tight.

To organize a workshop on an island and have the local community participate in it, one must have /gain trust of the community. Since most of the members of our association Tativaka are locals and occasional dwellers of the Island, we managed to surpass obstacles to organization of an event such as the lack of interest of the local community to participate and/or assist whether this be related to the logistics or attendance to the event or lack of seeing the event as an opportunity for the enrichment of the community. When faced with some issues during the organization of a workshop or ways inherent to the island life itself, Tativaka members who are also members of the local community or have families which are, helped significantly, either by knowing who to ask, by advice or concrete action.

Yet sometimes it is possible that the planned workshop is not happening at the location where organisers are a part of a local community. In this case we recommend connecting with the locals as much as possible beforehand, which will also contribute to the project itself. We recommend practices of study visits and getting involved in local events and festivities to get to know each other more.



Subsistence

Subsistence is for the organisers and participants of the workshop on a small island of great significance. Having in mind that, for example, on the island of Zlarin there is one supermarket with curious working hours and that the restaurants are closed outside of the tourist season, it is important to be well prepared and to have in mind other possibilities.

Because of this, the planning of getting the food for participants' meals must be meticulously planned upfront. The menus have to be planned so to have in mind which groceries to buy and transfer from the mainland to the island. Bonus tip: Be sure to have somebody help you with loading the groceries on the boat and bringing them down from it once you reach the island.

As previously mentioned, in our case the restaurants on the island were not working outside of the tourist season. The workshops were planned in the time of year in which the locals are not occupied with the tourist season, so to have an opportunity to talk and collaborate with them during our workshops. This brought upon the issue of preparing meals for a large number of people. The idea of bringing food back and forth from the mainland was very impractical since the schedules of the boats were not in accordance with our activities. Thanks to our good connections with the local community, we managed to contact a local chef whose working season just ended. The chef agreed to prepare meals, so the issue was solved.



Travel

Travel is yet another sensitive element while working on small islands, as you depend upon the local liner shipping company for the maritime transport. In the case of the island of Zlarin, since recently there has been only one boat that connects mainland and the island. Unfortunately, unlike previous boats that operate on this route, the current boat is quite sensitive to stronger southern winds and frequently stays at the port when such weather conditions arise.

As weather is something that is not possible to predict months ahead of project activities planning, and the winds are changing day by day, while doing workshops on small islands, you should be prepared that there could be some changes regarding the transfer to the island. Specifically, we were prepared that it might happen that the shipping company will not be transferring passengers even with the slightest change in the winds.

This issue became apparent during the second workshop of the DROPS project. Thanks to our good connections with local people, we consulted with local sailors on how to transfer the workshop participants to the island. They advised us according to their experience, and we were told to rent a taxi boat and transfer the participants as the shipping company will cancel all transfers that day, regardless of the chance of weather conditions improvements later on in the day. As soon as the southern winds died down, local sailors informed us that it was a good time to call for a taxi boat, so we managed to arrange a transfer for our participants.



Preparation

In conclusion, two elements are necessary in order to create successful workshops on small islands: good preparation and a good relationship with the local community.

We must emphasize that preparation also includes preparing the non island native participants of the workshop for the island life context they are entering. This is why it is important to send e-mails beforehand containing information on most important elements that are missing on the island — such as pharmacy, for example. In this way, you can create workshops with unforeseen obstacles.



3. Research workshop coordination

While creating the idea of a research workshop, it is important to detect the objective and the approach of research. When researching a very broad topic such as water, it is suggested to approach it from different perspectives, using the interdisciplinary, even transdisciplinary approach.

The objective of the research workshop 'Where does it flow? / Kuda teče?' was to investigate and observe the management of water on the island of Zlarin from the perspective of architecture, anthropology, and natural sciences.

Division of the groups – Circle structure

In order to be as efficient as possible, and having in mind the number of the participants, the researchers are to be divided into different groups. There are few ways the division can be created:

- a) Division according to the discipline
- b) Division according to the research topic

In the case of the workshop 'Where does it flow?' research topics were decided in a way that they also corresponded to the disciplines the participants were expert in. In the process of the division of the groups, coordinators created the proposition for participants /researchers, and according to the Sociocracy Principle of Consent, the decision was made to follow the proposition.

- All of the groups create a **Complete Circle** (18 people)
- Each group consists of **Team Circles: Anthropologists Circle, Architects Circle and Natural Sciences Circle** (6 people per Circle — in the case of our workshop)
- Each Circle has two group mentors, and combined, they create a **Mentor Circle** (6 people — in the case of our workshop)
- Inside the Mentor Circle, one representative from each Circles (Anthropologists, Architects and Natural Sciences) creates a **Coordinator Circle**.

Communication

The communication structure is set upon the structure of Circles.
Yet, the communication of all of the Circles is based upon Principles of Sociocracy¹:

The Principle of Effectiveness:

Devote time only to what brings you closer toward achieving your objectives.

The Principle of Consent:

Raise, seek out and resolve objections to decisions and actions.

The Principle of Empiricism:

Test all assumptions you rely on, through experiments and continuous revision.

The Principle of Continuous Improvement:

Change incrementally to accommodate steady empirical learning.

The Principle of Equivalence:

Involve people in making and evolving decisions that affect them.


The Principle of Transparency:

Record all information that is valuable for the organization, and make it accessible to everyone, unless there is a reason for confidentiality.

The Principle of Accountability:

Respond when something is needed, do what you agreed to do, and take ownership for the course of the organization.

¹ 'The Seven Principles', Sociocracy 3.0, <https://sociocracy30.org/the-details/principles/>



In the morning of each workshop day, during or after breakfast, Team Circles individually gather to create a plan for the day.

During or after the lunchtime, Coordinator Circle gathers to discuss the logistics and to check on the supplies and materials.

Before the dinner Complete Circle gathers to give feedback about the day. At least one person from each Team Circle should give feedback, but it is encouraged that more people take part in this process. The feedback is discussed and if possible, new solutions are provided according to the consent of everyone. Also, during the Complete Circle gathering, the groups exchange the data they obtained during the day. They exchange only the vital data and the data they deem it could be important for members of other Group Circles.

After the dinner, Mentor Circle gathers to discuss possible issues or propositions on enhancing the research flow and to discuss gathered materials and how to use it and represent it.

4. Land Art workshop coordination

While coordinating and facilitating a workshop focused on a creation of an art piece, the approach must be differentiated.

The group dynamics are quite different since all the participants of the workshop need to be included in the creation of a collaborative piece of art. At the same time, it is important to ensure that all the participants get an opportunity to create individual works of art, to gain a sense of the materials and the idea as well as a sense of confidence.

Given these prepositions in mind, we propose a model for a collaborative workshop. We emphasize the importance of using communication principles of sociocracy (mentioned in the previous chapter) during the exercises of the mentioned model.

1. Setting the rules:

If there is a reason for it, a set of rules is set upon the idea of how to create a piece of art. For example, the participants of the Land Art workshop gave consent to following rules based upon the idea of respecting the natural environment:

- The art piece will not be invasive to the environment in any way.
- To create the piece, participants will not pick plants or cut living wood.
- The trash found in the environment will not be a part of the piece, but will be placed in the designated bins.
- Mentors are here to advise, but participants are the ones who propose the ideas.



2. Individual to collaborative – building up the idea

In the first exercise, the participants gather around a proposed location. The final form is not determined — it is to be created spontaneously. The first participant will create a very small piece, and other participants will continue it, one by one at their own pace. Slowly, as each participant adds up their own contribution, the piece will grow, change and in the end finish when the last participant contributes.

3. Individual progress

During the second exercise, each participant creates their own piece of art individually. The participants get a certain amount of time to think about the ideas and then they create them. They can advise each other and ask for advice from the mentors.

When the works are created, each of the participants presents their idea, the execution, and the challenges, if they encountered any. Furthermore, the rest of the participants comment and discuss the works as emphatically as possible.

4. Collective work

After the first two exercises, the participants are ready for the final collective work. If the group is very big (5 or more participants), the group is divided into two or three groups and two or three works are created. Each group finds a location and materials for the piece and coordinates among themselves about the idea of work. They are to be advised by the mentors. When all groups have an idea of the work they wish to create, they present the idea to the other groups and comment on it. When everyone consents on the final idea, they start creating the works.

Often it happens that the work of art doesn't go exactly according to the planned idea, but the most important thing to do is to constantly revise and consult with each other so that in the end everybody is pleased with the execution of the idea.

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