

Personal Geographies

Project summary and outcomes

At Imagine IC's annual mixed media festival *Summerjam*, artist Monica de Miranda invited twenty young people from diverse cultural backgrounds to visualise their personal search for a perception of their cultural identity and roots by using new media.

During four weeks of workshops, De Miranda introduced a variety of media including performance, studio photography, video and audio-recording, and achieved positive interaction with parallel workshops at *Summerjam*. Combining her methods with the workshops in digital photography, guerrilla marketing and design and video-clip shooting, participants learned how to express and represent themselves by making use of mixed media and social interaction.

The project achieved:

- Participation of a large and very diverse group of young people;
- Symbiosis within the group and interaction between participants and young people from other festival workshops;
- Awareness of context for personal histories: 'how and under which circumstances do people migrate?'
- Creating awareness that representations of personal, subjective identities can become objects of future heritage;
- A travelling exhibition consisting of life-sized photo prints and audio files of participants, a series of 40 geographical hand maps, "Tuning" (an audiovisual representation that showed how youngsters in Amsterdam experience their environment), and a catalogue of the process and results of workshops in Lisbon, Amsterdam and London.

Process

Personal Geographies was a personal and subjective visualisation of identities by youngsters from Amsterdam. Participants produced personal maps on their own photos and hand scans and replaced geographical distance with emotional nearness. One of the methodologies employed by De Miranda during her workshops was called "Tuning," in which participants drove through their living areas using audio and audiovisual recording devices. They commented on locations and sites of personal importance, and tuned their car radios onto local music stations which expressed particular trends and cultural influences distinguishing the given areas. De Miranda had used this method previously with participants in Sao Paolo, London, Dakar and Lisbon (see below). The pilot results were finally placed into context with the results of these earlier global practices, which created participants' awareness on global common and uncommon grounds.

The project was divided in two stages:

- During the first two weeks participants collected material about their personal backgrounds. They scanned photos from family albums and made collages, audio tracks and storyboards that represented their often very mixed cultural backgrounds. They went on the internet, collecting maps of the countries or regions they, their parents or grandparents had descended from;
- During the second two weeks they put all of the material together, preparing it for Monica de Miranda's exhibition.

De Miranda had already been working with groups of young people in Europe, Africa and South America. With the addition of the personal geographies of the young Dutch migrant participants, De Miranda gave a large public insight in global migration history, through the perspective of urban youngsters.

Besides the achievements mentioned above, Imagine IC was fascinated that the media tools De Miranda used in the pilot not only provided participants with a direct and clear visualisation of their cultural backgrounds, but also established that this method-mapping gives insight into the personal and emotional value participants tended to add to certain aspects of their background and identity. They highlighted certain geographical locations and neglected others. Driven by experiences of nostalgia and melancholy (either their own or those of their parents and often grandparents), participants tended to manipulate their personal narratives. The stories behind these decisions were added to the results in audio or text format as an extra dimension to the exhibition.

Institution

Imagine IC

www.imagineic.nl

Artist and coordinator

Monica de Miranda

www.monicademiranda.com

Target groups

Twenty young people between the ages of 15 and 25, from diverse cultural backgrounds including Surinamese, Turkish, Angolan, Russian, Moroccan, Antillean, Ghanaian, Dutch and Portuguese