

People, Stories & Histories of Strovolos III

Public Art, Social Engagement and Situational Practices

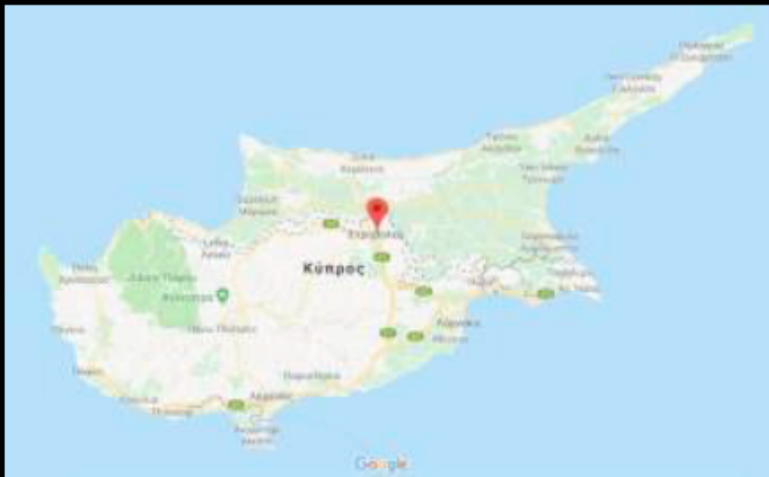
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People, Stories and Histories of Strovolos III is an on-going project. It started in February 2018 as part of the author's assessment for the course Public Art, Social Engagement and Situational Practices¹.

¹A few words about the author: Phivi Antoniou is an art educator. She teaches in state elementary schools in Cyprus and at the same time she works part-time as a scientific collaborator at universities. Currently, she is also a part-time Fine Art student at the University of Nicosia.

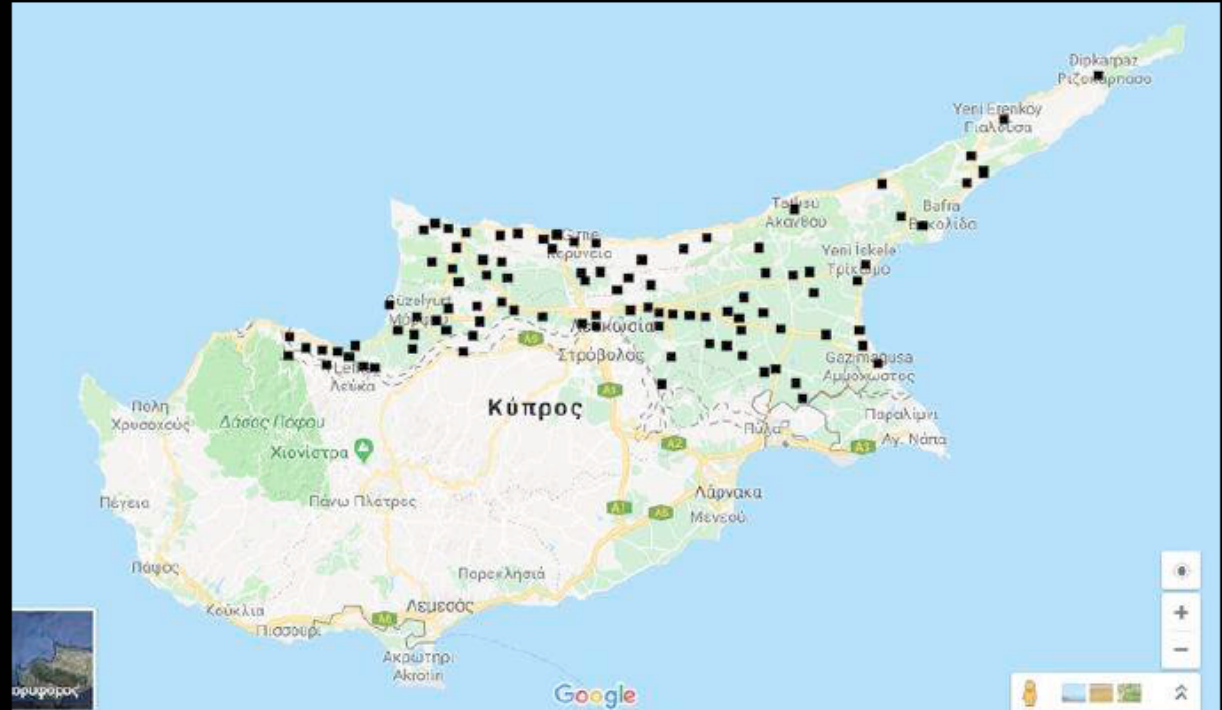


Strovolos is a municipality right next to the city of Lefkosa, the capital of Cyprus.

Strovolos III Estate

Strovolos III is one of the estates which were displaced people from the north part of the island after built by the Cypriot government to house the Turkish invasion in 1974. In total, there are 69 such estates in Cyprus with around 14 000 housing units (Ministry of Interior, 2018).

The first residents of Strovolos III moved in in 1977, 3 years after the invasion. They came from around 130 occupied towns and villages. Today, the remaining residents are from 101 villages, which can be seen in the map on the right.





Roof view of the estate



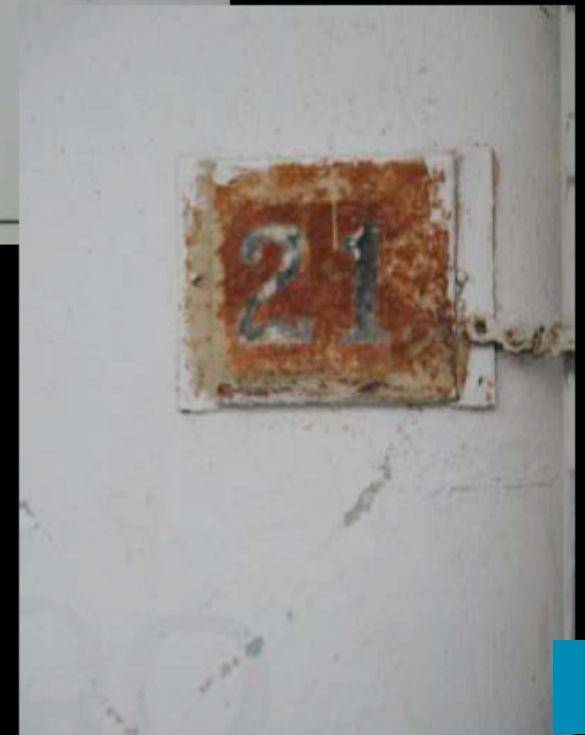
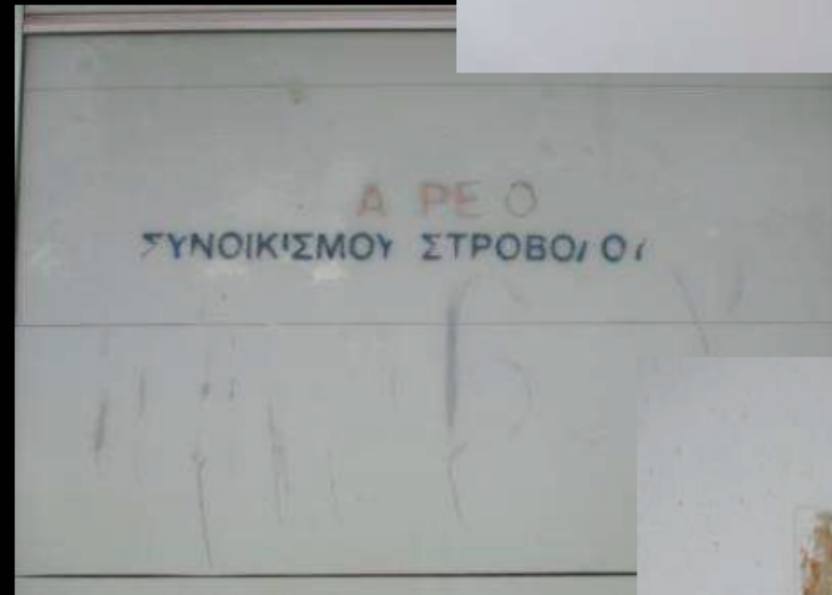


A visitor's impression from the site is a sense of abandonment. There are closed shops, unused buildings, no people walking around. It's a very quiet place. There are clear signs of wear on the buildings. That might seem surprising, because the estate is a quite dense man-made environment. There's a lot of cement and television antennas, indicating that people do live there. So, where are they?



The answer is that there are indeed people living there. Most of the refugees are now elderly people – many of them have passed away. So, the estate is slowly emptying. Their children and grandchildren moved out of the estate. So, many houses and flats are now empty. The heirs of the elderly people who pass away rent out the houses.

Most of the people who rent the houses are immigrants. So, now, there are two generations of people living in the estate, two very distinct, but also very specific and special groups of people. However, what they have in common is that they are all displaced people. The first generation were forced to leave their homes because of the war; the second generation also left their homes and their countries in search for a job and a better life.



On 18 May 2018, an arts festival took place at the square of Strovolos III. It was organised by the ARTos Foundation in collaboration with the University of Nicosia.

Students from the Fine Art Department of the University worked as volunteers and presented their work at the festival.

The Poster of the Arts Festival

**1 NEIGHBOURHOOD:
101 VILLAGES**

STROVOLOS III ESTATE

18 May. An afternoon Festival
Paleginissias Square | Πλατεία Παλιγγενεσίας

ARTECITYA, ARTOS FOUNDATION
FINE ART PROGRAMME, DEPARTMENT OF DESIGN AND MULTIMEDIA,
UNIVERSITY OF NICOSIA

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ARTOS FOUNDATION ARTECITYA NICOSIA UNIVERSITY OF NICOSIA STROVOLOS III ESTATE Creative Europe INNOVATION GYM




People, Stories & Histories of Strovolos III

The project

The arts festival seemed as the perfect opportunity to run an art project with the residents of the estate, for the residents of the estate. In a public art happening, it is very important to give the participants the opportunity to have an active role. To have the chance to speak up and their voices to be heard. To organize this event in a way that initiates interaction between people: the residents, the visitors, the organizers, the artists, the owners of the coffee shops around the square, everyone who was there. Interaction comes with communication and communication is reinforced when people share stories and experiences.

People, Stories and Histories of Strovolos III is a project about and for the people of the estate. Their experiences, their stories, their interests, their everyday life. There is a beautiful diversity of people living in the estate, but what is also interesting is the relationship they have with the site and with each other. They carry amazing life stories and these stories are truly worth being shared with the rest of the world.



Give voice to the
people of
Strovolos III

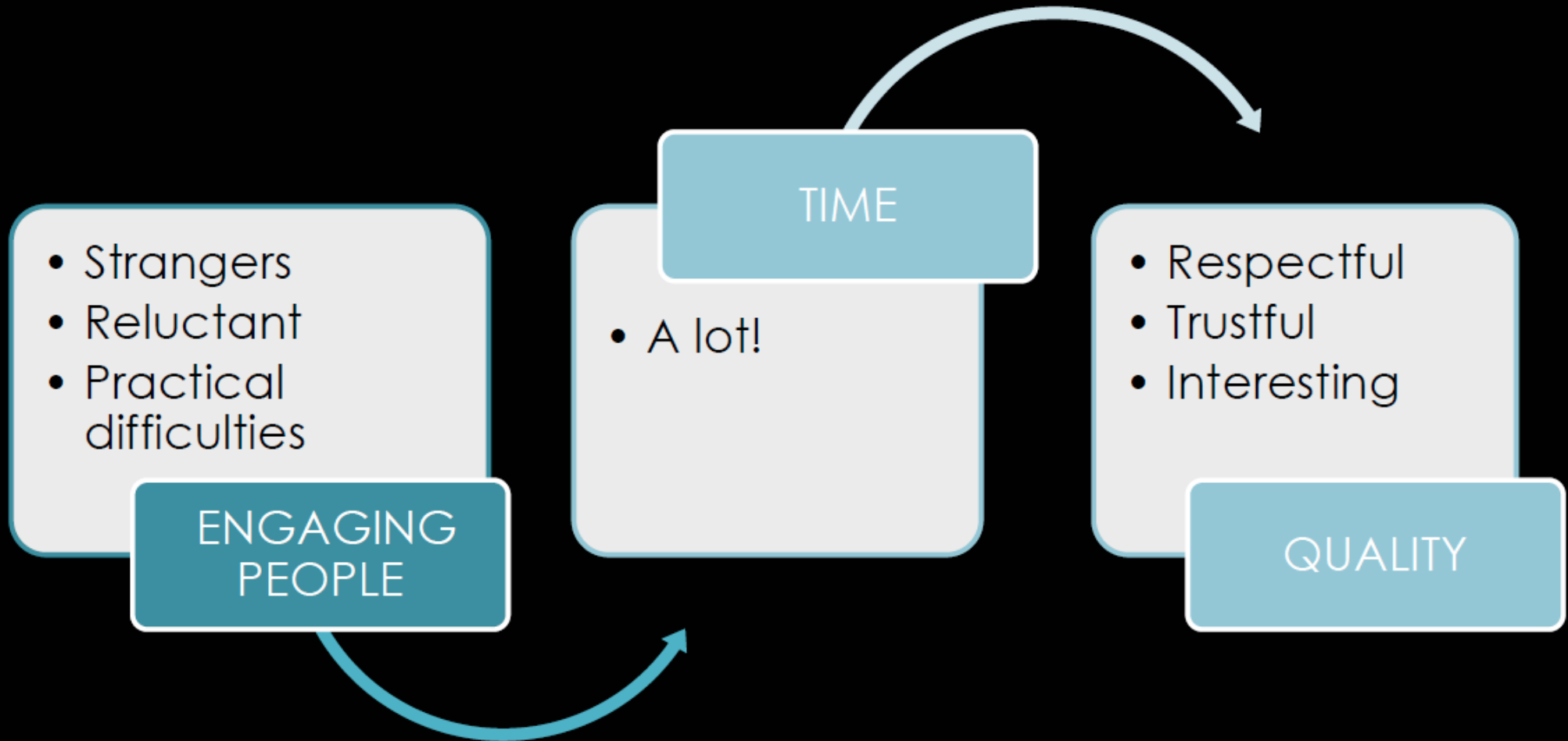
Documentation of
oral histories and
lived experiences

Objectives

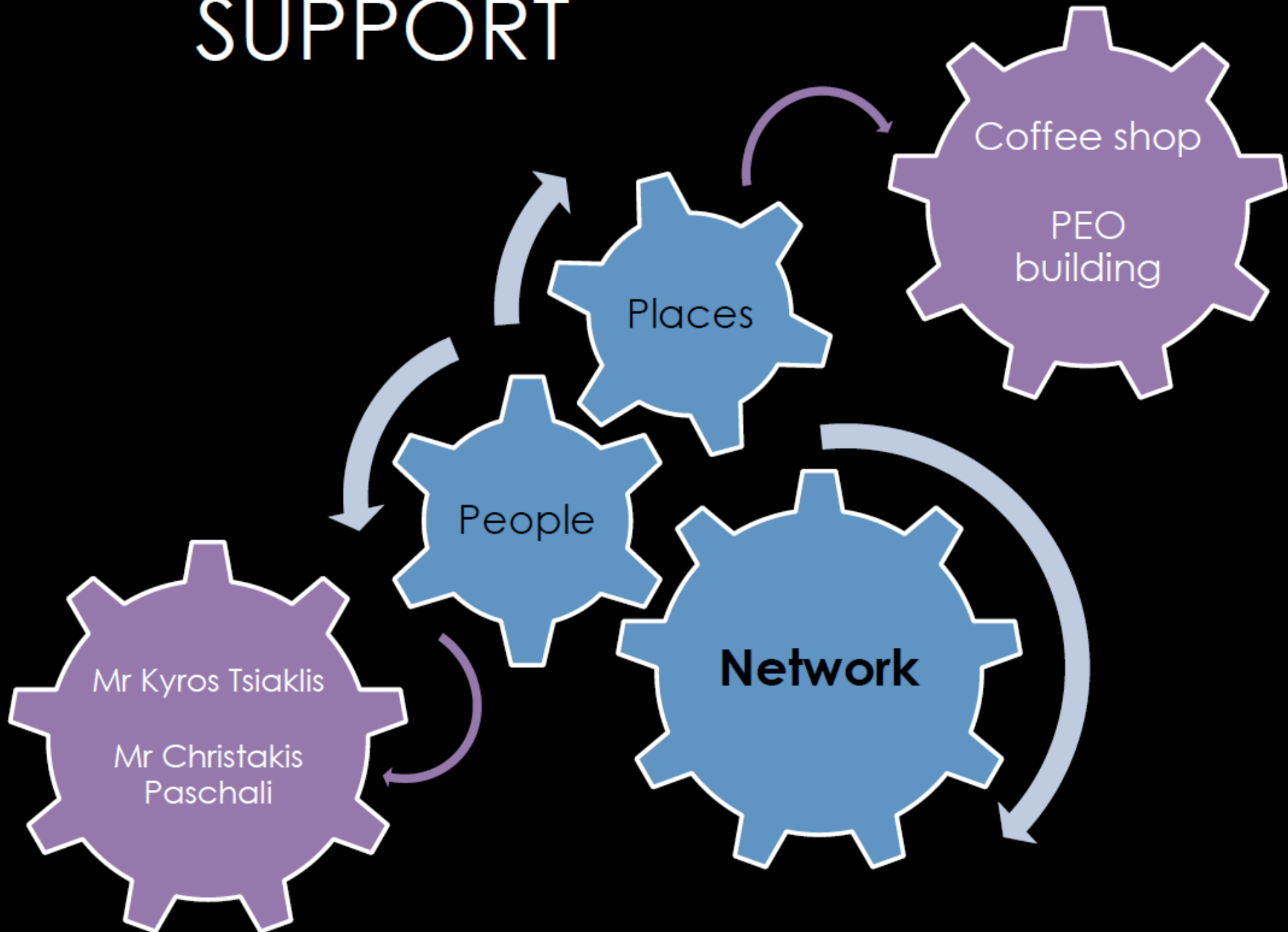
Active
participants in an
event that takes
place for them

Initiating
interaction and
the creation of
new relationships

CHALLENGES



SUPPORT



KEY INDIVIDUALS

Mr Christakis Paschali

President of the PEO Committee of Strovolos III and
Member of the Municipality Council



- ☐ Demographic information about the estate
- ☐ Access to photographic archives
- ☐ Mediation for sponsorship by the Municipality of Strovolos

Mr Kyros Tsiaklis

President of the Retired People;s
Committee of Strovolos III



- ☐ Contact with residents of the estate
- ☐ Advertisement of the arts festival
- ☐ Invitation for participation in the project

The project was based on a series of meetings and interviews with residents of the estate. The goal was to keep it as inclusive as possible when it comes to where the participants came from, their age, their sex, their interests, etc. However, it was not easy to meet and contact specific groups of people:

WOMEN

Visitors would not see a woman walking around the streets of the estate. Unless they knocked on doors, women were invisible in the public spaces of the estate.

IMMIGRANTS

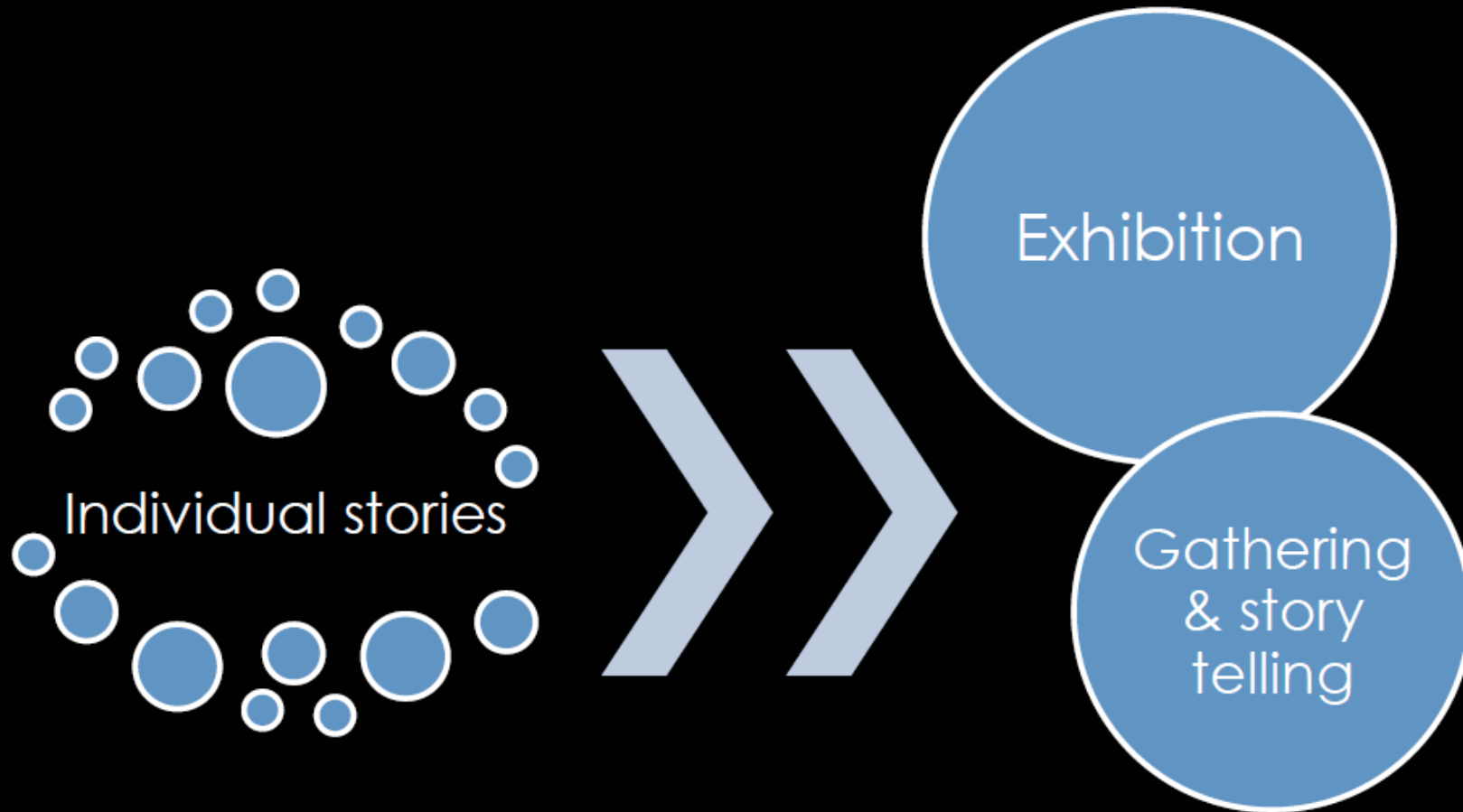
Due to their busy work schedule, they were not easy to meet. And those whom you did manage to meet, they were reluctant due to language limitations – they felt they would not be able to communicate with ease so, in the end, all the participants were Cypriots.

From the meetings emerged a rich interview and photographic material, which was presented at the Festival.





During the Festival





Portraits of some of the people who participated in the project. Underneath, a small quote from their stories, as they narrated during the interviews. They talk about their everyday life, their interests, their memories, the war, their childhood.



Mr Yiannos

Very proud of his participation in the estate's football team.

This was a glorious team!
The "Pancyprrian".
Did you see all these all
those cups on the shelve?
Guess who was the team
captain! I was the only
player who played in that
team from the day of its
establishment up until the
day it ceased to exist.
Come, I'll show you
the photographs.
They are a decade apart
from one another.
Let's see if you can find me.



Mr Christakis

He owns a small grocery shop and spends most of his time there. He also writes poems.

We are deprived of things...
These are the things I write about
with all the stimuli that displacement gave
us.
I was always like that.
I liked poems since I was a young boy.
When there was a homicide, the poets
wrote about it and they sold their poems.
There was a homicide once, that of Astero,
the step-daughter of Petronas,
the high school head-teacher.
Someone fell in love with her. She was 16;
they wouldn't give her to him. He killed her.
Oh, the poets wrote so much about this!
I wanted to learn. I loved that.
They sold their poems for a penny.
So I bought.
I wrote my first poem in '74,
when I was a soldier at the airport of
Lefkosia.



Mrs Niki

Her story is from their first days as refugees in 1974.

They took us from Saragio and they transferred us to Ledra Palace. We stayed there. We were around ten together with the babies. They gave us blankets and food. We had an unchristened baby there. She was injured from a bomb. The mother of the baby was my neighbor. She said to me: "Do you want to be her godmother?" I said: "Yes". So we went to a church. They had some clothes there which they had collected for the refugees. We found some clothes for the christening of the baby and we christened her.



I have a great time
with my friends.
We like motorcycles and
we like going out every day.
We play football all the
time. We smoke cigarettes
and we play football.
I'm a forward.
I also like motorcycles.
I don't have my own one,
but, if I could have any
motorcycle I wanted,
I'd like to have a KTM.

Nikolas

His grandparents live at the estate. He and his
friends spend all of their afternoons there.



Mrs Areti & Mr Pantelis

They were very attached to their garden and their trees.

We planted this garden when we came here. We put ceramic tiles on the floor. These are plums. They are almost ripe, they are turning yellow. Last year it made a lot. This year the wind made the blossoms fall. The lemon tree is always loaded. We have another one in the back yard. Once, it made such nice big lemons. We made lemonade with them. We also give to our children. Previously, we used to spend much more time in the garden, now we can't spend that much...



Mr Yiorgos

The owner of the coffee shop at the estate's square.

Lucia is like my daughter. I've had many dogs in the past, but none was like her. She's five years old. We've had her since she was two months old. But, we trained her to behave like a child. She participates in everything inside the house. She sleeps wherever she wants, she sits wherever she wants, she eats what we eat... My wife mainly taught her to do that. But she's a very well-behaved dog. Very cooperative. She's got a lot of perception, she's well-behaved and obedient. You see her. She's free around here all the time. She won't go away. The furthest she will go is up to my car. The problem I have is that, when I need to go somewhere and I have to leave her alone for a few hours, she get really grumpy...



Mr Kyros

President of the Retired People's Committee

In '61-'62 the Cypriot Workers' Federation was looking for a new employee. They knew that I was an active person, they recommended me. So, they came, they had a meeting at my village, they asked the villagers about me, what kind of person I am. A colleague said to them "You won't find a better person for this job". I was very active. In '62, I gave up my job as a builder and I went to the Federation. I worked for 35 years up until '97 when I retired. They made me a supervisor of the workers of Kyrenia and Morfou. I'll never forget that. I used to wake up at five, I left my village, Mia Milia, and I was with the workers by 6:30 when they started to work. I was with them all day long, from one work site to another. At nights, I passed by the branches we had in Lapithos, Karavas and Myrtou to check about their needs and I returned home at 10:00-11:00p.m. My children were already asleep. I didn't spend any time with them.



Mrs Eleni

Her story is about their life in their new house at the estate.

When we arrived here, life was very tough. We didn't have the things we needed. Two years after we came, my daughter was engaged. We were all packed in this small house. He had many difficulties. The day she was getting married was very hot. It was June. It was so hot! The musicians came, they sat and played the violins and they were covered in sweat. I was so sad. We didn't even have a fan, nor a shelter in the front yard. The sun was all coming into the house. I was so sad that day...



During the story telling gathering. Those who wanted to narrate their stories could take the microphone. The author had a coordinating role. In the end, the visitors were engaged in the conversation which continued until late evening.

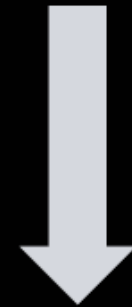
Art events in the public sphere are meant to provide broad access to arts and help construct meaningful experiences for the participants. In a democratic society, the most meaningful experience is the one which is directed and shaped by the participants themselves.

Through this art project, the residents of Strovolos III estate did not just visit the Arts Festival that took place in their neighborhood, but they were active participants in it, sharing with visitors their stories and histories in relation to the estate, the place which they all now call home.

This is an on-going project. It might had started as an assignment and as a project for the purpose of an Arts Festival; however, all sides which were involved in it felt that it is worth continuing. It is a desire that was expressed by many of the participants. The feeling that their stories have value and that it is worth preserving them.

The documentation of the stories of the people of Strovolos III still continues with a goal a book to come out from this effort. Many more people expressed their interest to take part in it after the festival.

"We're just old people, what is there that you would want to learn from us?"



"What we lived and we experienced needs to be heard by everyone. It's history; and it's disappearing because we're old and when we're gone our stories will be gone with us and they will be forgotten."

Reference

Ministry of Interior (2018). <http://www.moi.gov.cy/> (Accessed 02 March 2018).