

INSQUARE at Witte Rook



INSQUARE is a collective founded by Pankaj Tiwari and Dimitri van den Wittenboer. In our collaborative artistic practice we explore the potentiality of space. We approach space through its performative dimension questioning how it is produced and lived by human interactions with each other and our environment. Our artistic aim is to challenge the established socio-political structures by **discussing, imagining and performing** alternative prototypes. We believe that Art as a tool or as an applied medium is not revolutionary, but art as living practice it is. So, at the moment, we are a epicentre of tryout energies. We try all the so-called "**ideal societies**" and their practices. Especially, the ones that have been claimed to exist only in theories.

Every month we go for a **short residency** to different places to share our ideas and practices with different communities.

Addressing the "**crisis of social imaginary**" that is described as the difficulty to imagine something else than a neoliberal-capitalist society by Cvejić, B. & Vujanović, A. in "The Crisis of the Social Imaginary and Beyond" we are exploring our possibilities as artists to imagine and to try alternatives.

We ask three main questions

How to create safe spaces for **discussion**?

How to **imagine** alternative ways of living together?

How to **perform** sustainable prototypes?

In this exploration we came across **Commoning**

"In general terms, the commons are social systems in which resources are shared by a community of users/producers, who also define the modes of use and production, distribution and circulation of these resources through democratic and horizontal forms of governance." (Massimo De Angelis, David Harvie (2014) The Commons.)

"I use the word (commoning) because I want a verb for the commons," Linebaugh explains. "I want to portray it as an activity, not just an idea or material resource. This brings in the essential social element of the commons." (Peter Linebaugh)"

The residency at **Witte Rook** on the one hand helped us to develop our artistic positions and questions but also to explore them through actions in the neighborhood. We see public space as a realm where we can engage with people who we do not know to extent our perspectives.

The **actions** included using the window of the Buurtsalon as a mind map for public thinking, reading books in public space, inviting others to read their books, creating a space for listing to stories, making chai and sharing it and last but not least inviting people to have food together at Witte Rook on the last day. From our practical experience we developed a score that we call **Toolkit for Public Commoning**. It is an attempt to share our working methods and to invite others to try them.

Toolkit for Public Commoning

1. PUBLIC COOKING AND SHARING

Recommended to be done with two people, alone also possible

1. Go out in public space with a camping stove (you can borrow one from Insquare collective for free)
2. Take chairs with you (optional)
3. Sit in a space where people are present (this can be a public square, park, front of a store etc.)
4. Start preparing food or a drink (we usually make Indian chai)
5. Be attentive, accepting and open (look around, welcome eye contact, say hi to passers-by if appropriate)
6. Do not talk too much with your collaborator
7. Whenever people approach you offer them the food, your time and engage into a conversation

Tip: Think about what to say if asked why you are doing this

Addons

Several practices can be added to the core of Cooking as Sharing as Addons so to say.

A. Public Reading

1. While sharing food propose that next day there will be a reading, invite to join and to also read something
2. Fix time and location mutually
3. Be open in the content, it can be anything
4. On the reading day come together and set the structure of reading collectively

B. Public Thinking

1. Find a question that is important to you
2. Start making a mind map on a window of a shop. It is best if you can ask for permission from the owner. (removable glass markers can be borrowed from Insquare)
3. Invite the participants to think together
4. Include their points on the mind-map

Tip: keep it simple and use metaphors

2. PUBLIC INVITING

Public inviting can be an addon to cooking and sharing, but it can also be practiced on its own.

We recommend to do this practice with a collaborator, this will create less suspicion from the side of the passers-by.

1. Walk through the city and engage into small conversations with people who seem open
2. If you have a nice conversation invite the person for food on a coming day.
3. Invite as many people as you want
4. Be flexible with timing

Tip: Put focus on listening and ask questions.

Tip 2: Tell the people that you are doing this to get to now new people in the neighborhood.

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During our short stay in Breda, we developed and tried this toolkit in the neighbourhood of Witte Rook. Our aim was to engage with the people and also to see what can be produced by sharing food and our time with others. We started by putting two chairs on Edisonplein in front of the Buurtsalon and cooking Indian chai on a small camping cooker. The Edisonplein has a variety of small shop. We went there to buy the black tee, ginger and sugar and told the owners about our practice of commoning inviting them to join. Although not all of them came, awareness was created about our practice and it was more connected to the local community. While cooking the chai we knocked on the door of the Buurtsalon and asked if we could use their window to draw a mind map. They welcomed our project and also, offered us more chairs because some people were already waiting for the chai and engaging in conversations. We started drawing a mind map with the main questions of our research and invited the people who were there to join the discussion. Many interesting contributions came, but we also noticed the limitations of this practice. Often the people had difficulties connecting to our terms so that we realized that this practice needs to be developed by finding a way to communicate with un-informed participants. We invited the people to come again on the next day for the public reading and bring something that they would like to read. The next day we repeated the session. It was interesting that some people came again and also brought their books. There was, however, a limitation in the language since our Dutch is only basic. Next to those practices at the square, we did two hours walk each day in the neighbourhood. Our aim was to meet people who are open for a conversation and invite them for a lunch, which we did at Witte Rook on the last day. We were amazed by the openness of people to talk to us and most of the ones who we have invited came.

Overall we can say that while most of the people we met welcomed us with an open heart and engaged with enthusiasm, some were hesitant and doubted our intentions. What we have learned throughout our work in urban spaces is that it takes time to be accepted by the people. Trust has been broken badly, by using public spaces and the creative medium for commodified relations and the exercise of power. So that now, if we want to explore alternatives it always must start with building trust. We asked ourselves how this trust can be built? How can something be introduced into everyday life that is unusual? Our answer is, that it needs time and repetition to establish a new way of living together. Even in three days, we could see progress in this trust towards us and our unusual actions.

Another question we asked ourselves is: Why we are doing this? Our answer is, that it is not an act of charity, not social work, because we as individuals were looking for those connections with the neighbourhood. We are practising prototypes of structures that we miss ourselves. It is therefore a collaborative position.

Finally, we always ask ourselves, what did we learn and what is the next step? The time in Breda helped us to develop our ideas through the practical work that we described, but also through the readings that we did in the night and through an online conversation that we had with the local artist Klaas Burger. At this moment **INSQUARE** is in its starting phase and we will continue to learn and sharpen our tools in the future. We are planning to develop the **Toolkit for Public Commoning** in the following residencies and to also invite others to perform it in their neighbourhoods.

While as artistic research and practice this format of a short term residency is something important to us, we also feel a need to establish long-term relationships with our collaborators. We would like to thank everyone who we met during our stay in Breda for an inspiring time and especially the Witte Rook team for welcoming us and hope to come again soon to continue the work.



While we see the everyday life as our artistic material, it is NOT a passive material, NOT an object of our experimentations. Instead we see the material as a Subject in our artistic practice and an equal collaborator that we approach with sensitivity and respect.