



get involved

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my public island

CONCEPT

No one else can be in the place where I now am. Where do I end, and someone else starts? How much space do I need, and how much am I allowed to take? What separates me from the others? My public island is an invitation to take place in public space, an experiment about personal borders and the way we present ourselves as public beings.

In My public island, every participant explores on their own the temporary conquest of a spot of common ground. With this action, they abandon their pedestrian anonymity and become active public identities. Confronted with the reactions of passers-by, the statement of the border turns into a communication threshold.

A field for debate and discussion is then open, exploring the limits between private and public, individual and collective.



PROCEDURE

For our experiment in Venice we choose a corner between Via Garibaldi and the Riva waterfront, a busy place with both tourists and locals.

We gather the group together to get to know each other. The same questions are asked to every participant: name, age, nationality, profession, spoken languages and religion. Meanwhile, the first line is drawn around us, spatially enclosing the group. At the same time as we become aware of the differences between us, we realize that we now belong together. A border between us and the others appears. It all depends on the definition we make of "us".

To define our own borders is to define ourselves. Participants are then given a roll of colorful tape and asked to create their own personal public island. By taping a line around themselves and staying inside, they claim as their own a piece of public space.

The location, form and size of the island is for each one to decide. Once the place is chosen and the lines drawn, they stay inside first for 10 minutes. They observe and become aware of their surroundings.





Then they write their names on it. They have now to confront the feelings of being publicly exposed and the reactions of the people who watch or talk to them. After another 10 min, they can (if they want) change something in their island to revise the way they communicate with the "outsiders". They spend in total 30 minutes inside.

After this time, we get together again and make a tour through each island. Every "owner" explains how and why they did what they did, how they felt about it and how the interaction with the people was.

To close the round, we sit together in our original common field and reflect on the experience. We decide together to leave the taped lines there. At the end, symbolically, we abandon our island while the group dissolves.

RESULTS

Despite having the same starting conditions, participants had the most different experiences during this time. Some wanted to feel protected and chose "safe" places in order not to draw the attention. These had less interaction with passers-by.

Others made their island in very exposed places, like on top of a bridge, and had therefore constant reactions from people. And yet still others didn't want to draw any border separating them from the rest, so they were unnoticeable sitting as observers.

Size and shape say also a lot about the way we present ourselves: a heart shaped island, a room with a table for two, a pointy shape with an exterior balcony or an open square with an inviting door. After sharing everyone's experience, we understand from which decisions derive which reactions and consequences, both spatial and behavioural, and we get to know each other much better.

My public island was an opportunity to self-experience the public space as a common ground that belongs to all of us, understanding at the same time the responsibilities that it implies having the rights to it.

Through this simple experiment, every person was strongly confronted with themselves as public beings, with what public space means and the feelings of inclusion and exclusion. They took the challenge of using their differences as a tool for communication and mediation.



For more info and images, visit:

<http://www.stiftungfreizeit.com/2012/11/my-public-island.html>

For video:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=dLqLu1mJ-5A