

MILICA ILIĆ

RESHAPE: An Experiment in Collaborative Change-making

METHOD

Our societies are facing multiple pressures. Extreme polarisation, rising intolerance and growing nationalism seem to have invaded the political space. The climate catastrophe is looming over us, without agreement on how to prevent it, or even postpone it.

Freedom of expression is under threat by authoritarian governments; political opinions and choices are being manipulated on a scale never seen before. Extreme commodification is invading even the most intimate aspects of our lives.

Deeply rooted in society, with a finger on its pulse, the art sector feels the effects of these growing tensions. Threats to freedom of artistic expression, economic weakness and precarity, market orientation, systemic inertia and marginalisation are all effects of these same processes. Diversity still seems to be an ideal that is hard to achieve, as we see how homogenous most of our teams, programmes, and audiences still are. To a great extent, the art sector relies on models in which growth, extraction, and productivity are the norm.

Art plays a crucial role in reimagining our societies. It enables different perspectives and opens up our imaginations to the potential of a different society. Art can be the rebellious voice that relaunches the debate on how we can best live together, caring for one another and for the world around us.

To achieve this, the art sector needs to be appropriately equipped. It needs to embrace diversity and collaboration as its guiding principles and to work within models and practices that nurture freedom, fairness, and solidarity. Could the practice of these values bring about the emergence of new and different structures and ways of working, in tune with the democratic and civil role of the arts? As we in the arts begin to think of ourselves as actors of change, where do we start? How do we rethink our methods and our institutions? Whom do we choose to be our guides and our allies?

RESHAPE is an attempt to kick-start our collective imagination. It is an experimental, collaborative, bottom-up process that creates instruments for transition towards a new, fairer arts ecosystem.

RESHAPE has been a three-year research process that has developed alternative organisational models, structures and practices in the arts, in direct relation to society and its evolutions.

RESHAPE has been carried out by a partnership between 19 intermediary art organisations from Europe and the southern Mediterranean, co-financed by the Creative Europe programme of the European Commission. At the heart of this research is a bottom-up process involving 40 artists and art workers from across Europe and the southern Mediterranean, who collaboratively created a series of prototypes that reflect and provoke this transformation. They propose concrete tools and ways of working that are more equitable and more sustainable, in line with the civil role of the arts.

RESHAPE concerns the role that the arts play in society and its evolution. The following are some of the concepts it proposes.

Broader thinking

The arts operate within the policies of nation states. RESHAPE is an invitation to assume and to proudly show that the playing field of artists and those working in the arts is by default much wider than that. In spite of all the barriers, in spite of all the differences between lived experiences, current support systems, economic and political dynamics, resources and the ability to be mobile, the art scenes throughout Europe and the southern Mediterranean are closely interconnected, sharing multiple and complex influences. To imagine any radical change within this context, a broader scale is essential.

To reimagine an alternative arts ecosystem, RESHAPE proposes taking this transnational perspective as its starting point. In the arts, we are part of a sector that reaches from Reykjavik to Baku and from Saint Petersburg to Casablanca. We carry the responsibility to overcome differences, to listen to voices that are less heard, support the fragile, share our advantages and act in solidarity. We care for the local roots of artists and art practices and for how interconnected they are on a global level.

RESHAPE chose to set out from this broader geography, while remaining open and porous to other contexts.

Highlighting signals of future evolutions

Across Europe and the southern Mediterranean, artists and art workers have already been experimenting with alternative ways of making, presenting, and accessing art. They test strategies to broaden their outreach, to engage with citizens, to connect across sectors and to align with the values they defend. Most of the time, these artists, art professionals and organisations operate well below the radar of well-established art circuits. On a local scale, they hack, circumvent, provoke, and play with the art system and its usual practices, not to break them, but to make them fairer and better adjusted to both the arts and the wider society. They are the experts in transformation, trailblazers of resilience and local innovation virtuosos who are today testing the possible evolutions of tomorrow.

RESHAPE makes these initiatives more visible, so that their experiences can benefit the broader sector. Throughout the life cycle of the project, by means of open invitations, hundreds of initiatives have been identified and listed in the Directory of Alternative Practices, published online. This is now a unique source of inspiration for all those in the arts who are interested in a different way of working.

Collaboration

RESHAPE is a collaborative framework for artists and art workers who are already experimenting with alternative models and possible futures. They have shared their proposals for the transformation of the arts ecosystem. Four independent advisors selected 40 artists, activists and art workers

(Reshapers), bearing in mind the diversity of their experiences and contexts. The Reshapers made up five groups that worked together over a period of 18 months. In all, they held 15 workshops, two plenary meetings (Intensives) and spent countless hours of online and on-site meetings, to imagine and construct proposals that would inspire future changes in our sector.

RESHAPE proposed five wide-ranging topics, all related to the crucial challenges of the arts today. They are Arts and Citizenship, Fair Governance Models, Value of Art in Social Fabric, Solidarity Funding (later changed to Solidarity Economies) and Transnational/Postnational Artistic Practices. These topics were only roughly described and were intentionally kept open, giving the Reshapers the freedom to tackle them according to their own needs and interests. Six Facilitators worked with the groups to help them in their work. The precise focus of each group, their methods of working, and the content and format of their proposals were left entirely up to the groups themselves.

From the onset, the groups worked in physical meetings, as well as remotely. Each group planned three workshops, all in different parts of Europe or the southern Mediterranean, allowing them concentrated time to work on their topics, while building links to the respective arts and activist scenes of the cities in which they worked. The two plenary conferences, or Intensives, brought the groups together to share their experiences and compare their findings, while inspiring their research through contact with actors from fields other than culture and the arts.

RESHAPE required actors from very different contexts to bring together their professional and personal sensibilities, abilities, and experiences in order to create a joint vision.

Experiment and create

RESHAPE embraces experimental methods. It proposes and tests the idea that the evolution of the sector can and should be initiated by a collaborative, bottom-up process. RESHAPE is also a playing field for experimental ideas. It not only provides space for reflection, but is an invitation to propose and apply concrete, feasible and sustainable solutions to critical problems, to test them and make them accessible to the entire art sector for further development.

Inspire transition

RESHAPE has engaged in an intensive process of often heated discussions, profound reflections, collecting information, tracking blind spots and refining concepts. The resulting proposals are now here. They are poetic, playful, and ambitious. They are ideas to be used, analysed, built upon, and shared. Above all, they are calls for transition and the transformation of unsustainable practices. They require new allies and champions to help them inspire true transition.

Disseminate, engage, create alliances

The structures that constitute the partnership carrying RESHAPE have an important role to play. Partner organisations are all intermediary structures, all with a mission to support the art scenes in their respective countries. They have the ears of the art professionals and policy makers. They are well placed to discuss and share the process and ideas of RESHAPE and to work locally to raise interest for both the methods and the proposals.

An intense period of presentations and practical workshops have brought the ideas, proposals, and tools of RESHAPE to broader professional audiences.

The two conferences, one at the beginning and one at the end of the project, connected the ideas and findings of RESHAPE and shared RESHAPE's experimental process with the broader, transnational arts community.

Finally, those involved in RESHAPE, in what has now become the RESHAPE community, are the people who are carrying the process further, engaging yet more colleagues, building on these ideas and bringing the transition towards a more just arts ecosystem a bit closer.

RESHAPE calls for a transformation led by artists and those working in the arts. The pioneers and creators who are already experimenting with alternative methods make up the creative and resilient core of the art sector. RESHAPE shows that by working collaboratively and in solidarity, across borders, disciplines, functions and hierarchies, those engaged in the arts can be the driving force of the sector's positive future.

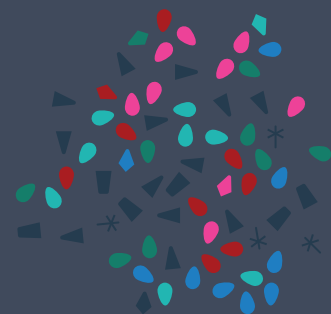
The People

RESHAPE involved 40 artists, activists and art workers ('Reshapers') from all over Europe and the southern Mediterranean, who were supported by 6 facilitators and 4 advisors as well as a group of 19 partner organisations.

- Art and citizenship
- Solidarity economies
- Value of art in social fabric
- Fair governance models
- Transnational / postnational artistic practices
- None
- 40 Reshapers
- 6 Facilitators
- 6 Associated Partners
- 13 Partners
- 4 Advisors
- Other local or international art professionals



The participants had **different roles** in the project. They were Reshapers, facilitators, advisors, partners, and associated partners.



Reshapers chose one of 5 proposed **trajectories**, thus constituting 5 groups, each dedicated to a crucial challenge for the arts sector today.

APPLICATIONS

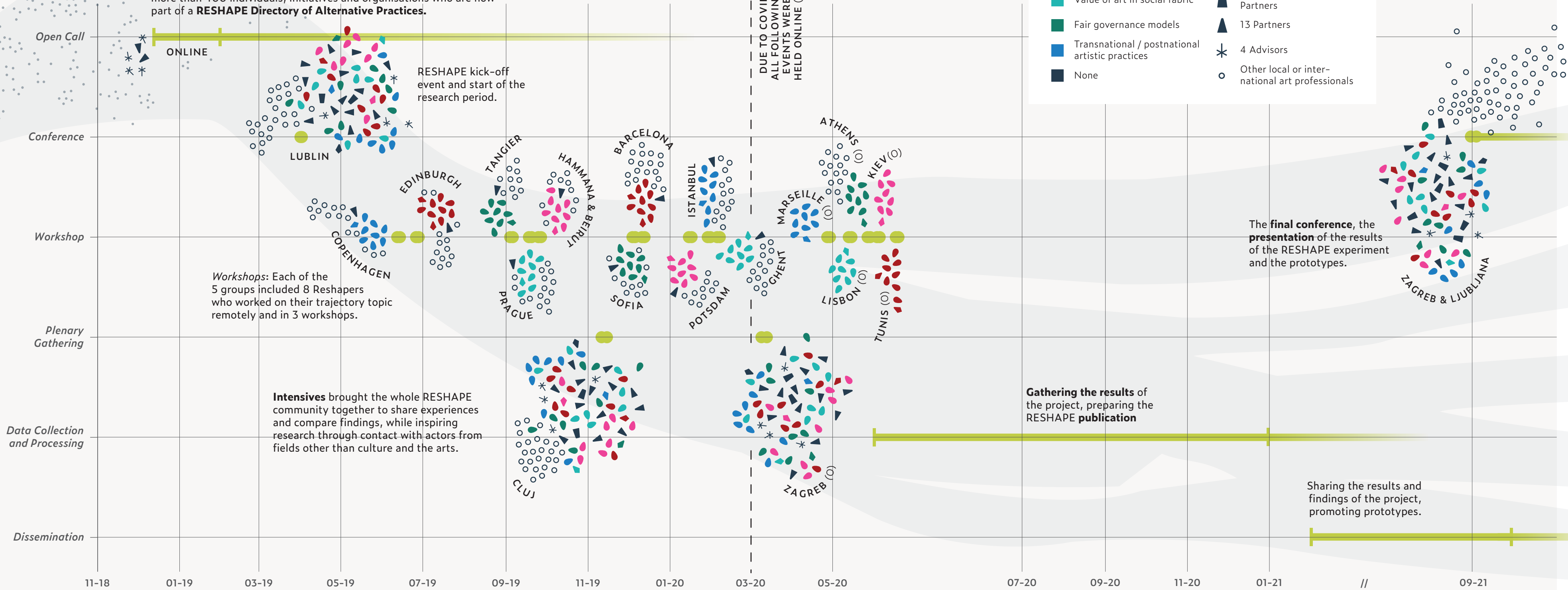
Open call: An invitation for artists, organisations, collectives, cultural workers, activists and others in the field to share their **alternative and experimental models of making, presenting, and/or accessing art**. From those applications, **40 Reshapers** were selected, as well as more than 400 individuals, initiatives and organisations who are now part of a **RESHAPE Directory of Alternative Practices**.

The Project

■ Art and citizenship	● 40 Reshapers
■ Solidarity economies	◆ 6 Facilitators
■ Value of art in social fabric	▲ 6 Associated Partners
■ Fair governance models	▲ 13 Partners
■ Transnational / postnational artistic practices	✱ 4 Advisors
■ None	○ Other local or international art professionals

The Prototypes

- The Solidarity Tax**
●
- ArtBnB**
●●
- The Gamified Workshop Toolkit: Values of Solidarity**
●●●
- Introduction to Solidarity Economies Proposals**
●●●●●●●●
- Governance Of The Possible**
●●●
- Evaluation — Actors, Values, and Metrics**
●●●◆
- Transnational and Postnational Practice Manual**
●●●●●●●◆
- Department of Civil Imagination**
●●●●●●●◆
- Value of Art in Social Fabric**
●●●●●●●



Workshops: Each of the 5 groups included 8 Reshapers who worked on their trajectory topic remotely and in 3 workshops.

Intensives brought the whole RESHAPE community together to share experiences and compare findings, while inspiring research through contact with actors from fields other than culture and the arts.

The **final conference**, the **presentation** of the results of the RESHAPE experiment and the prototypes.

Gathering the results of the project, preparing the RESHAPE **publication**

Sharing the results and findings of the project, promoting prototypes.