

BELONGING

THE PROJECT

BELONGING is a transnational initiative designed to enable young people to explore intercultural dialogue – grounded in the specificity of personal and social opportunities, as well as the challenges which arise around new migrations and the making of new communities.

Working in urban locations with young people from culturally mixed backgrounds – in London/Newham, Lisbon suburb/Casal da Boba and Paris/20th arrondissement, the project organized a series of video workshops, one in each location, with key local partners.

*“I got to know some things about the people close to me
that I did not know before.”*

Focusing on themes around migration, identities and the making of new communities, *BELONGING* explored how young people talk about belonging – how layered migrations shape communities, and how young people manage multiple, flexible identities while belonging to more than one place.

Working with creative video artists and film-makers -- in small groups --- the project led to each young participant making his/her own film on the subject of his/her choice. The objective was to deliver youth voices and perspectives on these major issues, through video, and to ensure that these voices are heard by different audiences - their local community as well as mainstream audiences, institutions and policy makers in the 3 country locations.

The 43 short films which resulted from the workshops provide an interesting picture of life today and a valuable insight into the contemporary thoughts of young people in city contexts. Interestingly, the films show how the idea of belonging has been interpreted in a wider sense in both Portugal and France: in both locations, belonging is at different times about neighbourhoods, about social experiences, and about personal existential attitudes. It is not just a matter of cultural identities, as in the London case.

The project was also designed to see how the young people would approach issues of sharing space (conviviality, territories) in culturally mixed urban neighbourhoods.

What we have learnt is that the way young people feel is determined by a range of things including intergenerational issues, male/female relationships, fear and danger in the streets, the role of the police (especially in Paris) as well as many other facets of life. A recurrent theme in all three locations is doing nothing, having nothing to do and being bored; so too are issues relating to peer pressure, and being influenced and manipulated by others. Unsurprisingly, scenes of habitual prejudice and daily life racism are also represented in some of the films.

Chosen for their distinctive nature, each of the three city locations has its own local history. This individual nature appears in the background in most of the films, and in some it comes very much to the fore.



Newham was chosen for its diversity and the films represent the mix of the borough, with a strong presence of young people of Asian origin, as well as a new generation of migrants from Eastern Europe. The London videos represent a colourful account of what belonging means for young people residents. The diversity of clothes, food, fabric and people provides a vivid picture of the local Asian community. At the same time, some young people talk about what it takes to feel part of where they live, including the struggles to create new communities.



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Casal da Boba is a district of Lisbon that is home to people whose families came from the Cape Verde Islands. They used to live in slums, but now apartment flats with gas and electricity have replaced the former improvised houses. People of different generations relate what they feel has been lost and gained through this urban resettlement project in terms of belonging, as they explain their nostalgia for the place where they used to live. At the same time, music and dance, and young people's smiles give a positive feel to this series of films.



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Paris 20th is one of the poorest districts within the walls of the city, near the 'back-door' of Paris -- a working class area where successive groups of immigrants have settled. Among the social housing estates, we are shown the roughness of life, its difficulties and its dark aspects. Humour, however, is never far from this contemporary snapshot. Here and there, the young people know how to find ways of talking about serious issues while having fun at the same time – they discuss loneliness, being bored, and how absurd it can sometimes seem to be asked to name a country to which you belong.

THE WORKSHOPS

BELONGING organised a series of 3 video workshops, in 3 urban locations. Each workshop lasts c. 5 days – which makes it an intensive process.

Prior to those workshops, a 2-day induction session was organised for the local partners whose task would be to deliver the workshops (workshop producers and facilitators). Working with video artist Su Tomesen, we prepared a format that allowed the local partners to develop their own sense of ownership of the project, adapting the process to their local needs – while benefiting from the project team's past experience and its knowledge of young people's creative video work associated with local history.



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The workshops were organised and produced with our local partners, Vende-se Filmes (Lisbon), Collectif Tribudom (Paris) and Forest Gate City learning Centre (London).

Focusing on different contexts

Chosen for their distinctive nature, each location has its own local history, which is considered below.

Newham is one of the poorest and most diverse boroughs of London.

Casal da Boba is a neighbourhood located in Amadora, a city in the suburb of Lisbon. It is home to people whose families came from the Cap Verde Islands. They used to live in slums, but apartment flats with gas and electricity have now replaced the former improvised houses.

Paris 20th arrondissement is one of the poorest districts within the walls of the city, near the ‘back-door’ of Paris, a working class area where successive groups of immigrants have settled. Many social housing estates were built in the 1970s.

Preparing and integrating the social history elements of the project

In each workshop location, a social/local history ‘workshop pack’ was prepared, concisely addressing:

- Britain/Portugal/France in the history of Western European expansion (explorations, invasions, emigrations, colonisations, economic exploitations), and consequent national and global changes over centuries;

- London/Lisbon/Paris as cities in global history, and the impact on their local histories (the history of ‘other’ people's presences and contributions from abroad in their economic and social development);
- London/ Lisbon/Paris/: 20th and 21st century immigrations and settlements;
- Newham/Casal da Boba/Paris 20 arrondissement: the very local social history of each city workshop, 20th and 21st century.

"I was asked MY ideas and opinions so my film would be based on my abilities"

Taking into account the specificity of each workshop location and adapting the project accordingly

Each project location chose its own ways of delivering the historical element of *BELONGING*.

In London it was delivered during the first day of the workshop, by the workshop tutors. In Paris, the team took the young participants to the new museum ‘La Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration’ - a museum telling the (hi)story of immigration in France through a creative multi-media exhibition. This was followed by a local history walk in the 20 arrondissement of Paris, delivered by a local historian. In Lisbon, the local history element was delivered as a slide show on day one of the workshop.

Unleashing voices of urban youth creatively, through video

A major objective of *BELONGING* was to create the right setting to unleash voices of urban youth engaging with the question of ‘who belongs?’ and related social issues of immigration, xenophobia, and identity in the new Europe of the 21st century.

"I'd like to say that I enjoyed being with all the people and I loved the workshop. To tell the truth I didn't want it to end."

BELONGING endeavoured to use art as a refresher of cultural discourse – through the production of image-rich video essays. The video workshops brief was to deliver the creation and production of bold, exciting and varied video essays or stories – opening up the subject of how the young participants feel they belong. To this end, workshop facilitators had to ensure that they would find ways of infusing the workshops with the challenge of being (artistically) imaginative.

As a starting point for discussion, it was agreed that the workshops would focus on the lived experience of ‘belonging’ in new 21st century Europe – either the experience of the young people, or of someone they knew (friend, family).

Language and music issues

Workshop participants were also urged to think of **using ‘language’ that translates** and which can be comprehensible across the language/country sites of the project – avoiding too much talk and, as much as possible, expressing narrative through use of images.

Similarly, young people were encouraged to use sounds and create music themselves (including collaboratively).

THE CONTEXTS

Casal da Boba, in the suburb of Lisbon



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Portugal was traditionally a country of emigration before it became a country of immigration beginning in the 1960s. Before then, there had however been some foreigners present in the country from as far back as the 15th century: because of its geographic location, many European merchants, as well as African slaves who were brought against their will, had reached its shores.

The arrival of the first African workers from Portugal's colonies occurred in the first half of the 1960s when Cape Verdian people were recruited for construction and manufacturing jobs to fill the growing labour shortage associated with the emigration of Portuguese men.

"My goal for the future in the area of arts and creativity is that this is only the first of a thousand of films that I can do!"

From the 1970s, the process of decolonisation linked to the political and military instability in the Portuguese speaking countries of Africa (PALOP) resulted in emigration to Portugal. For example, the decolonisation of Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau led to the sudden movement of half a million people to Portugal, in particular to Lisbon. The majority were "retornados" – people born in Portugal and their descendants. Alongside the retornados came Africans, especially from Cape Verde and Angola.

Following the "Carnation Revolution" that led to Portugal becoming a democracy in 1974, and later the independence of the empire's territories in Africa in 1975, major changes occurred. Alterations in Immigration law from then reduced the automatic right to Portuguese citizenship for Africans born in the PALOP states whose parents, grandparents or great-grandparents had not been born in Portugal or who, until the 1974 revolution, had not been living in Portugal for 5 years. Very few Africans could fulfill these conditions, except those who had served in the Portuguese colonial army or its administration.

Later in the 80s and 90s, with an increasing demand for labour, Africans, Brazilians and West Europeans were granted the right to settle. Since Portugal joined the European Union (EU) in 1986, other groups from Africa and South America have immigrated, and, in the past few years, there has been a rise in arrivals from Ukraine, Moldova, Russia and Romania.

"I'd like to be able to do more sketches, be more adapted to making short films and other films in the future. I'm honored to have worked with such a humble, professional and nice group of people."

Timed with the new arrivals from the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s, several neighbourhoods such as *Bairro de Fontainhas*, *Vendas Novas* and *6 de Maio* were formed in the district of Amadora in the outskirts of Lisbon. The majority of their inhabitants came from Cape Verde.

The new inhabitants built their own houses, extending them gradually as their families grew by adding a floor to their dwelling as is traditionally done in Cape Verde. The houses were improvised and the streets narrow, but this made for close living: the doors were always open, making relationships with neighbours crucial to people's social lives.

For a long time, town planning was non-existent in those areas, making lack of electricity and deficient sanitation/sewage systems problems of the inhabitant's everyday lives – reinforcing the bonds that linked the inhabitants to each other, as neighbours and exiles.



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When the land where *Bairro de Fontainhas* and its surrounding neighbourhoods were reclaimed by its owners, the local authorities created a relocation programme for all its inhabitants. In 2002, most were relocated to *Casal da Boba*, a new purpose-built development.

As the families moved into new buildings and flats, their lifestyle changed dramatically from that in their old neighbourhoods and that of Cape Verde: the tower blocks flats in which they were re-housed had closed doors which kept them apart and more isolated from each other.

The neighbourhood is composed of different groups but is not very diverse: in 2005, 63% of *Casal da Boba* inhabitants were of Cape Verdian origin, while 31% were of Portuguese, 5% of Angolan and Sao Tomé, and 1% Gipsy origin.

Low levels of education have been an important factor in the social exclusion of new arrivals since about 23% of the heads of family could not read nor write.

Currently, low levels of education, lack of qualifications and therefore high unemployment are strongly affecting the younger generation which constitutes nearly half the population of *Casa da Boba* (49% is between 0 and 24 years old).

London Borough of Newham



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In this area of the East End of London, farming used to be the major activity, until the construction of the docks in the 19th century. The transformation was accelerated by the building of the Royal Docks in the 1850s to make space for new, larger steam ships. That led to the development of other industries and triggered movements of population from other places in Britain to this part of London, as well as from other countries of the world.



At a time when the docks of Newham were the largest docks in the world, directly linked to the railway, industrialisation thrived, and migrant workers from Ireland, Germany, Italy, Poland and Russia settled in the Docklands locality.

After 1900, Jews from Germany and Eastern Europe also moved to the area. In the 1920s, after the First World War, many West Indian and Asian sailors and troops who had been demobbed chose to stay. By 1930, the area had the largest number of Black settlers in London.

In the decade after the Second World War, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Caribbean families moved to the area, responding to the government's campaigns to get people from the Commonwealth to come and work in England. Many settled.

"I got to know some things about the people close to me that I did not know before"

In 1965, the "Borough of Newham" was created from the amalgamation of the old boroughs of East Ham and West Ham. Extending from the East of the City of London to the North of the river Thames, the borough now comprises about 250, 000 inhabitants.

It has become the ethnically most diverse borough of the UK: there are more than 30 different communities in the borough, and more than 300 languages are spoken.

Newham has the lowest white population in London, with 61% of the population drawn from Mixed, Asian or Asian British, Black African, West Indian or Black British, Chinese, and other groups. The borough has the second highest percentage of Muslims in Britain (24.3%). In recent years, Eastern Europeans from countries who joined the EU have also settled.

As the population has grown substantially in the past 10 years, the proportion of the young population aged 0-24 years has increased by 23% in that period of time, making it the youngest borough in England with the highest proportion of people aged 0-24 in England (41%), and the lowest proportion of population over the age of 65.

"This project helped me a lot, especially the topic 'Belonging' which really got me thinking about where I actually belong. It was also a lot of fun and it improved my creativity and my research skills"

In 2007, a television programme branded Newham the "4th worst" place to live in the UK. The study took into account crime rates, school results, pollution, economic activity and property prices.

At that time, the unemployment rate was of 6.7%, the second highest rate in London. It is a densely populated borough where over one quarter of households are overcrowded.



The borough of Newham is going to be hosting the 2012 Olympics in Stratford, where an Olympic village is being built at present. As part of a regeneration plan, the local authorities have highlighted the change in opportunities for the local residents, and the intended improvement in their standard of living. Local people have, however, been concerned about whether it will bring long lasting benefits to the area and its inhabitants.

The Amandiers Street neighbourhood, also called “the Banana” in the 20th arrondissement of Paris, and “The 3 Fuchsias” housing estate



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The Amandiers neighbourhood is located in the North East of the 20th arrondissement of Paris, in the *Belleville- Menilmontant* area, situated on a hill overlooking the city.

The area of *Belleville* was predominantly a working class neighbourhood until the 18th century, before it became, at the turn of the 20th century, a place of first settlement for migrants fleeing persecution and for economic migrants.

In the 1920s and 1930s Ottoman Armenians and Greeks settled in Belleville, followed by German and Polish Jews before the Second World War, and by the Spanish who fled the Civil War. In the early 1960s, Algerian and Tunisian Jews fled conflicts in North Africa and settled in the area, shortly before Algerians, Moroccans and Tunisians, as France called for workers from the former colonies and protectorates. More recently, in the 1980s, a substantial Chinese community had settled, followed by Sub-Sahara Africans.

The area is densely populated. Nowadays, *Belleville* still is an area of Paris that many migrants first come to, upon their arrival, hence the great cultural diversity and the social fragility of the area, as job opportunities are low, financial means precarious and social exclusion pronounced.



© Collectif Tribudom 2008

The Amandiers neighbourhood is emblematic of these issues. As older housing was replaced by tower blocks and social housing estates, beginning in the 1960s, 40 years of successive urban reconstructions have had the effect of closing this neighbourhood in on itself.

The vast majority of families living there are from an immigrant background (North African, West African and, more recently, Asian) with a higher proportion of foreign born and migrants than the Paris average.

I learnt to express myself on a delicate topic, with the support and the creativity of the group

While many residents in employment work in construction and manufacturing jobs, the rates of unemployment are higher in the 20th arrondissement than in Paris overall (the last census carried out in 1999 found that 21.60% of 15-24 years olds in the 20eme were unemployed, compared with 14.70% in the 20eme and 12% in Paris).

The Amandiers is a “young neighbourhood” as the proportion of young people in the area is the second highest in Paris (27.41% of 0-24 years old in the 20eme against 25.73% in Paris as a whole), but inequalities in education in the arrondissement have affected access to social mobility.

I learnt to develop ideas and opinions. I liked it a lot.

The Amandiers has been portrayed as a ‘sensitive’ neighbourhood by the local authorities and the media. In June 2007, 25 years’ old *Lamine Dieng* died during a police intervention in the area. Following his death, demonstrations by local residents angrily criticized the police’s practices and violence in the neighbourhood. The event and its aftermath reinforced the feeling of exclusion and social difficulties which young people of migrant descent in urban areas have experienced in France.

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