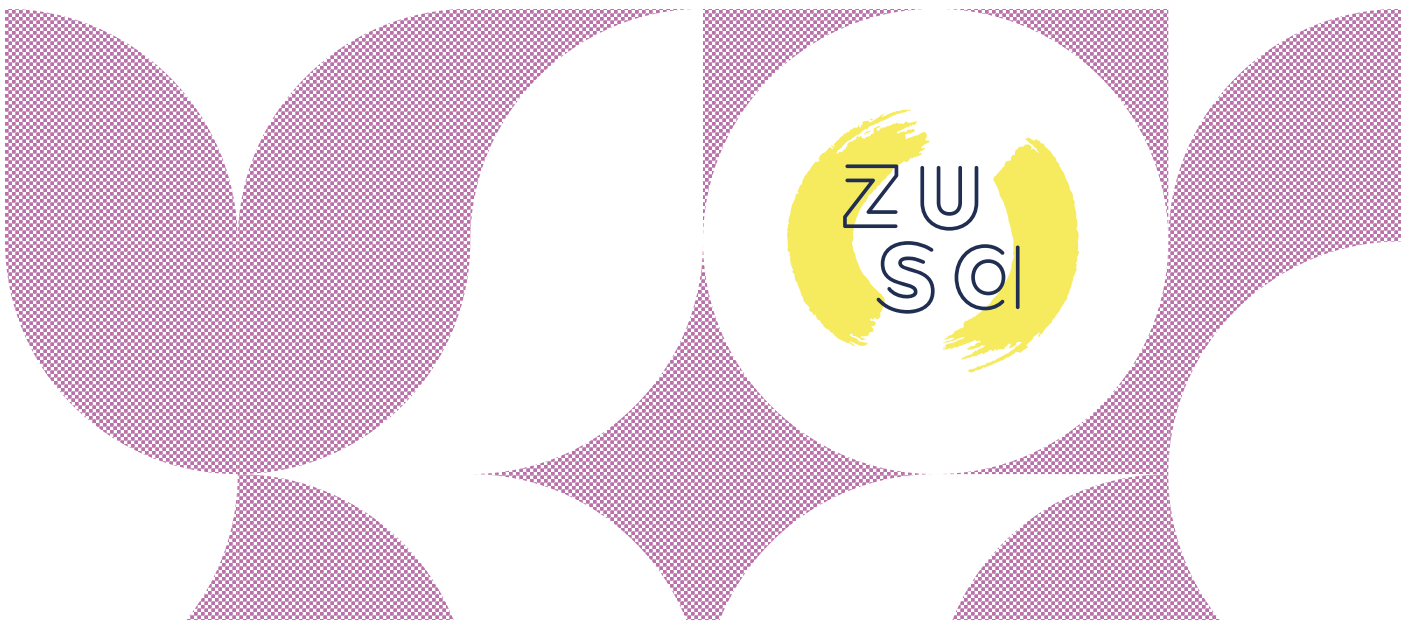
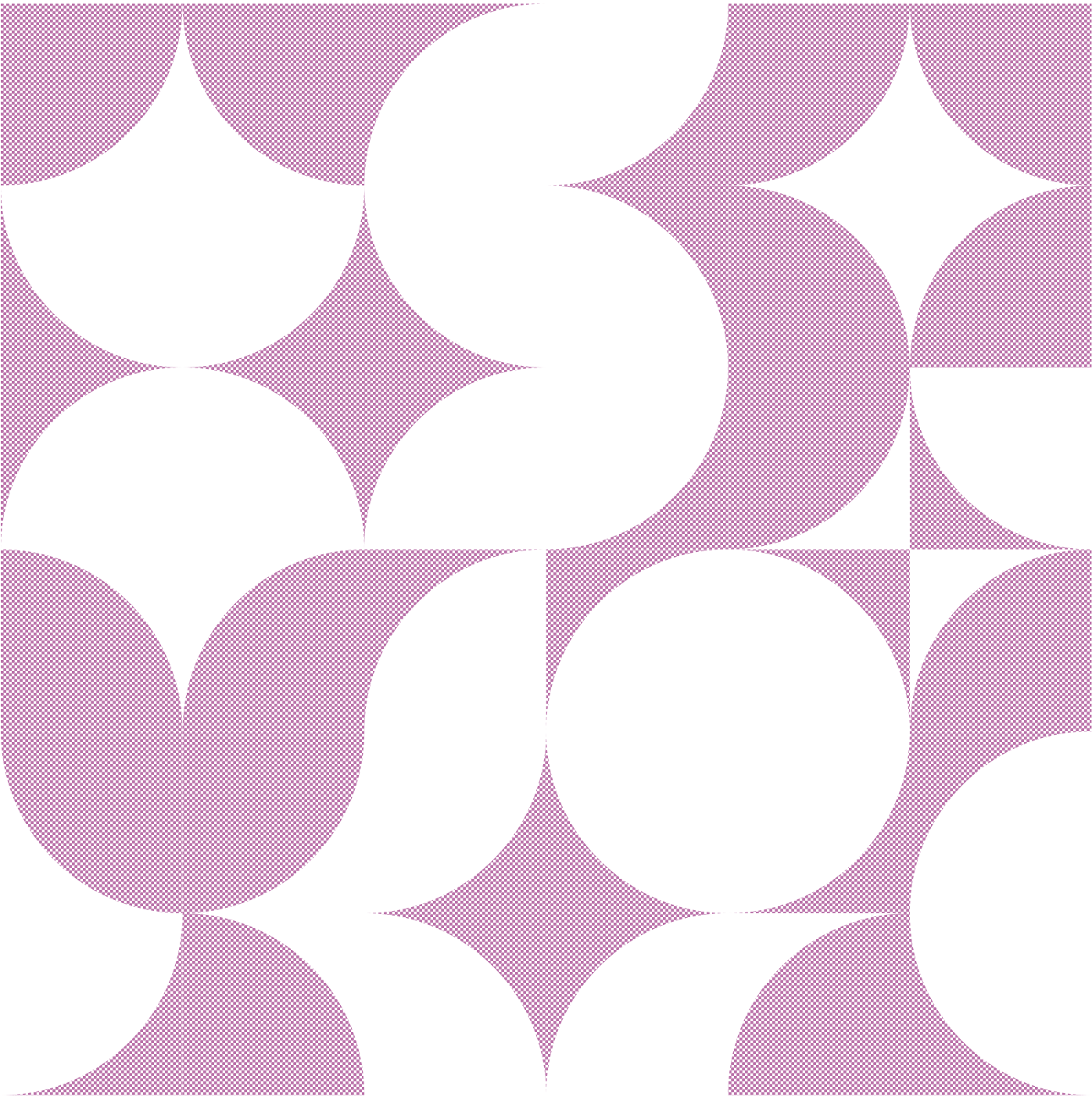


zusa impact report 2023





credits★

Big shoutout to everyone who helped make this impact report happen.

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For more information you can visit our website www.zusaculture.org.

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Credits: Constanze Flamme



I'm zusa (they/them). My name comes from the German word "zusammen", which means "together", but please pronounce it like 'sousa' and I'm small so use the lowercase 'z'.

Three years ago, I started as an independent entity from my mother organisation, MitOst e.V. I live in the vibrant city of Berlin, and I work in many different parts of Europe, North Africa, West Asia, and beyond. My mother tongue is English, and I also speak German, Turkish, Dutch, Arabic, Ukrainian, Polish, Lithuanian, and French.

Over these years, it has been a learning journey for me, especially with the heart breaking social, political, and economic challenges in the world. In the coming pages, I will share my fluid and ever-evolving story with you throughout 2023, highlighting the impact I have made.

My values revolve mainly around the art of collaboration and the do-it-together approach. I believe that resilience and sustainability are essential for cultural ecosystems. I support freedom of expression, social justice, and democratic practices. I do this with my partners from civil society, cultural organisations, educational institutions, independent collectives, and, of course, artists.

My support takes different forms; I can be a collaborator, partner, facilitator, or consultant. I primarily help others improve their work by introducing methods and tools of collaboration, which we explore together. I love to act as a backbone for everyone who needs me and shares my values. I believe that change starts with the realisation that the world can be a better place for all of us.

While writing this report, I reflected on why I'm writing it and for whom. Being in a transitional period in my life, I'm thinking about the past, living in the present, and planning for the future. Therefore, I believe it is a good moment to reflect on what I have achieved and the impact I made, especially in 2023.

This impact report is the story of my journey over the last year. I'm sharing with you moments where I felt proud, happy, and delighted, as well as times when I felt frustrated, depressed, and perhaps hopeless. For me, life is about experimentation, playfulness, succeeding, failing, and trying again. It is a dynamic movement where the change of the flow leads the way, and I am sharing how I learned to swim sometimes with the stream and sometimes against it.

Whether you are an artist, cultural practitioner or interested in cultural impact in societies, I hope this report will give you inspiration, motivation and maybe a bright look to the future.



It's challenging to see direct change, especially when you're in the cultural and civil society sectors because of its intangible nature. You can feel and sense it, but you can't quite touch it. We, who work in culture and arts, have faith that we're doing something good for humanity, whether it's by developing societies or making the earth a more liveable and even happier place for everyone.

My focus has always been on fostering more inclusion and equity in our societies, encompassing social justice, climate justice, and ensuring participation and representation for all. I understand this sounds utopian, and it is! Therefore, I don't expect to change the world alone or in a single year. It's a journey that requires time investment and collective efforts.

Collaboration is pivotal in my work; it's both an approach and an attitude. It serves as an effective tool for systemic change. Over the past year, I've witnessed that building relationships rather than competing for scarce resources can make a real difference in our societies. Culture and arts are integral parts of civil society, and cultural activities can act as spaces and vehicles for positive change, influencing people's behaviours, sparking imagination, inspiring, and empowering insights.

Over the years, I've witnessed change by connecting people and organisations across geographies, sectors, disciplines, and cultures. I've learned that intercultural interactions can enhance learning and impact.

These connections contribute to building strength and resilience. I facilitate this through various activities, such as hosting learning spaces, promoting experimentation (embracing failure as a part of progress), and fostering playfulness and joy. This approach has led to many serendipitous incidents where I've tangibly felt positive change, bringing me delight and pride in the impact I'm making and how I'm making it, alongside with whom.

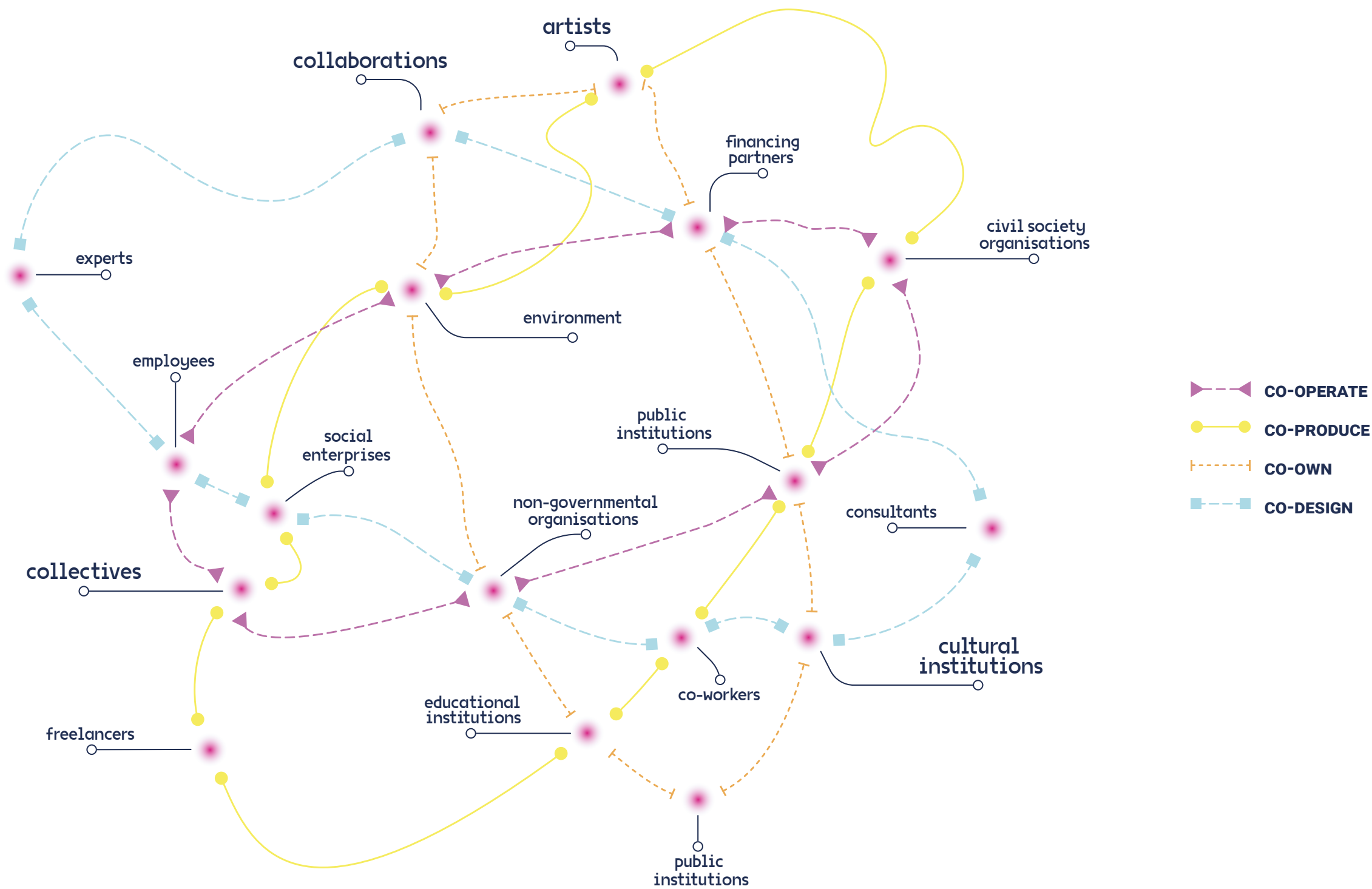
Life has taught me that people need to try, fail, and make mistakes to learn, and that's how I've learned too. That's why I (re)grant funding to facilitate learning-by-doing. For me, the process is more important than the product, and the lessons we learn along the way are what we carry and pass on to others.

You might wonder if we're using culture and arts for other purposes, potentially stripping them of their intrinsic value and making them purely instrumental. My answer is no, I don't believe so. I believe arts and culture can connect people and build relationships adding to their value by default. It facilitates change by sharing new ideas and fostering understanding. Instead of diminishing their intrinsic worth, it enhances it, and this belief is at the core of the change I advocate for.

Credits: Karim Habashy



#stakeholder map







Credits: Constanze Flamme

story of strength: building a network of hope with zusa

Working in zusa is part of my professional growth path and journey, I have learned so much. It is, mainly, not about what we do but how we do it, starting from the way we function as a team, trusting the process and trusting the people that we work with and for. Nevertheless, mostly working with zusa is part of my personal beliefs renewal system, believing in the common good, in a better world, in humanity and communities as well as believing that sometimes, it is the small acts that are genuine and true that makes all the difference.

It is a huge struggle these days to keep these beliefs, but I had the privilege to witness and work with hundreds of organisations and communities from different geographies and realities. Every day, I see and witness those who practice resilience, solidarity, adaptation and all of these catchy words that we keep repeating, but then I see it in action. They taught me a lot more than I can count and they made it less harsh to still dream and believe in the change.

My motto for the last 7 years is to tell me stories about people you work with, this is the fuel that keeps me going, that keeps me ready to get drawn in admin and paperwork; the fresh air that kept me eager to learn more tools, frameworks and methods to make this possible and easier.

To connect these amazing people together, to make the space to exchange and learn from each other and give each other strength and sense of community. Indeed, I can think of so many aspects, yet if I want to bring it to it is very core, then for me, zusa is a space to collect and spread hope through all of us.

Silvana Naguib
All-Around Culture programme,
Monitoring and evaluation officer zusa (Berlin)

cultural resilience: sustaining independent initiatives in turbulent times

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Anadolu Kültür has been in a long-term partnership with zusa for the VAHA programme, which kicked off in 2020 and currently continues with its second round. We have developed the programme with cultural spaces and local organisations, tailored to their needs and transnational exchanges. Through this programme, we have the chance to work with independent initiatives that open up space for critical thinking and public discussions through arts and culture from all around Türkiye and neighbouring regions, which is highly important for our organisation considering the recent political and cultural context. Our partnership with zusa makes it possible to reach out to a wider network in Europe and enhance the transnational aspect of our work. The zusa team members coming from diverse geographies especially enrich the overall work of the organisation. The solidarity we build together through VAHA is very meaningful both for us and the organisations involved in our programme. We hope that our common efforts to resist against the increasing oppression and challenges, as well as the growing economic pressures and global conflicts, can continue to multiply through organisations and their works in VAHA.

Aysu Arican
VAHA Programme manager
Anadolu Kültür (Istanbul)

Credits: Selin Bağçacı



15



Credits: Constanze Flamme

echoes of solidarity:
strengthening european cultural bonds ♥️🌀

For the past 70 years, our role at the European Cultural Foundation (ECF) has been to evoke a sense of belonging among Europeans. To foster a European 'sentiment', as our founders articulated their ambition in 1953. Personally, working with arts and culture remains an inspiring, yet increasingly challenging and contested sphere of public engagement for me. Especially if one continues to believe that arts and culture do not simply stop at national borders or that they can be confined to only one European way of thinking and creating. The concept of Europe would not even exist without exchanging, interacting, differing, and co-creating with the numerous regions, people, and cultures in our vicinity.

2023 has been an immensely violent and tragic year full of human suffering and loss in too many societies. Arts and culture can take a role that can help individuals in processing anxieties and traumatic events and contribute to making communities more resilient and optimistic once again. Within that role our collaborating with the zusa team within ECF's programmes, has been pivotal to exploring these complex and increasingly challenging European dimensions of socially engaged cultural work.

Our partnership with zusa and my own long-standing collaboration with its founders builds on more than a decade of co-designing and realizing the Tandem cultural collaboration programmes with MitOst. As a first-generation spinoff from the wider community of MitOst, zusa has carried forward profound methodological experience and regional cultural networks into our most recent collaborations for the Tandem Regions and VAHA programmes. Both these programmes address cultural key questions within ECF's current strategic working approach and have occupied my mind for a longer time already. One of these questions was at the core of Tandem

Regions programme: How can we initiate regional cooperations that help us to maintain sustainable livelihoods across Europe and how can we co-create fair and peaceful futures, especially for marginalised local communities in the regions of Europe.

Another pressing question was how autonomous art spaces and cultural initiatives can remain safe spaces for artistic expression and civic engagement, especially in Türkiye and its neighbourhood. The VAHA programme tries to find answers to this increasingly urgent issue of arts and culture work in Europe.

In 2023, zusa's well-proven designs for creating meaningful peer learning experiences and facilitating knowledge exchange among practitioners and communities were essential for the success of the Tandem Regions networking meeting in Sofia. The zusa team's extensive local contacts and European networks were crucial for generating an informal yet highly productive exchange of good practices and new ideas among cultural workers, creators, local activists, public officials, social impact investors, researchers, citizens, and political decision-makers from more than 20 countries.

In a similar manner, the zusa team's longstanding experience and adaptability in facilitating cross-border exchange with and for local partners and communities from challenging environments such as Türkiye were extremely helpful during the preparation and launch of the second round of the safe spaces in VAHA programmes.

Philipp Dietachmair
Head of Programmes
European Cultural Foundation (Amsterdam)

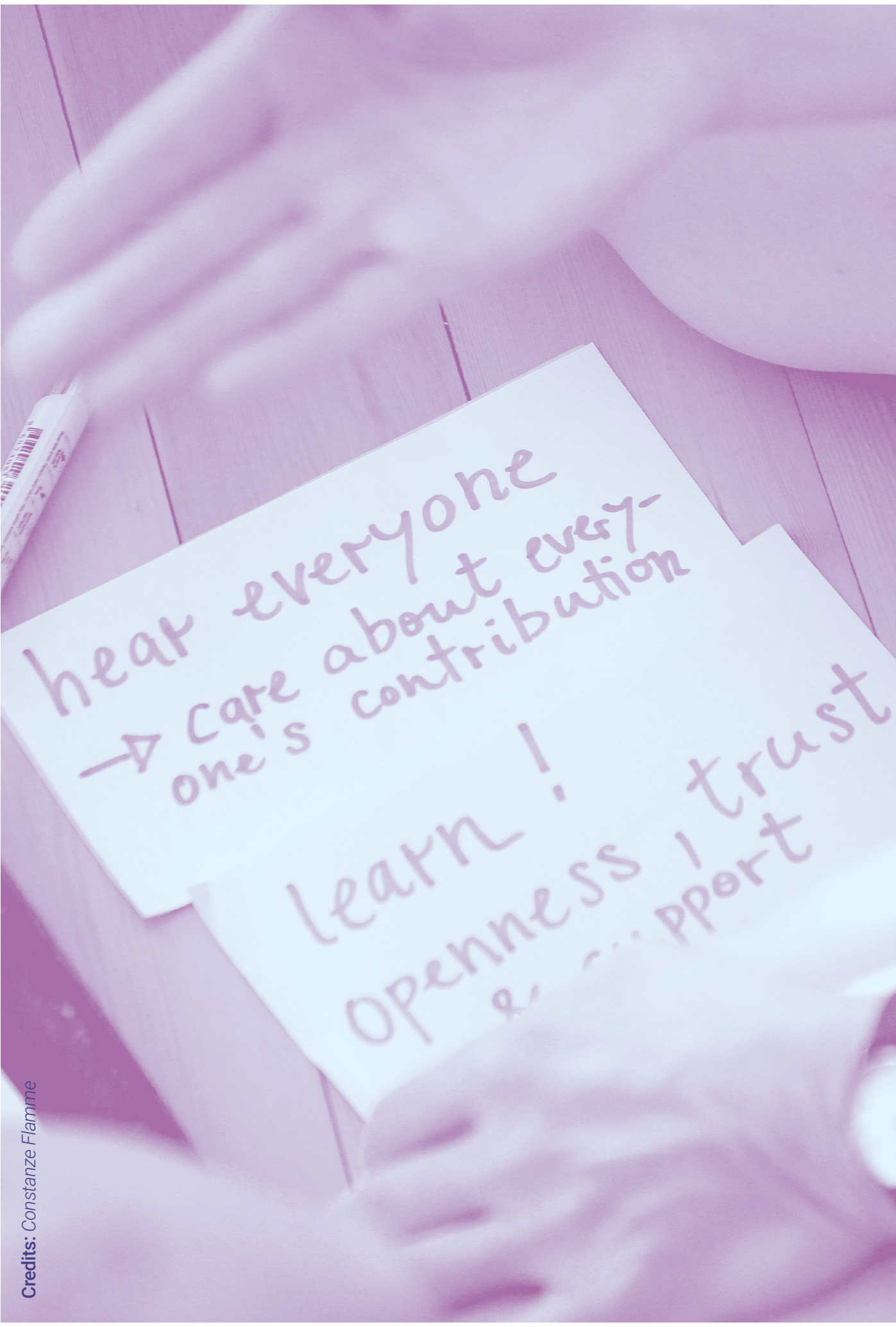
art and wellness: finding peace at air zusa

The AiR zusa and its team now hold a special place in my heart. I can imagine that this is not something you can always say about the project or residency, but I was lucky to experience a thoughtful, caring and even tender approach during my stay in Berlin. For me, AiR zusa was a space to calm down, gaze at the autumn view from the window, to record the sound of snow falling and night birds singing and remind myself how important it is. I want to particularly highlight the programme's focus on mental health support, which played a crucial role in shaping the project's scope and flow. I sincerely hope that the team continues to keep this valuable component and shares their methodologies with colleagues.

Nataliia Revko
AiR zusa resident
Researcher, curator and emerging artist (Odesa)

Credits: Nataliia Revko





Credits: Constanze Flamme

rediscovering balance: a journey restored through mental health grant support



At the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, I found myself on vacation with friends in Egypt. With flights to Ukraine cancelled, I didn't know what to do. However, at that moment, the director of ogalala kreuzberg, reached out, inviting me to stay in Berlin. Initially, like many Ukrainians, I thought that I would stay in Berlin just for a few weeks before returning home. However, the occupation of Mariupol by the russian military started from the very first day of the invasion and eventually, I didn't have a home anymore to return to.

After a brief stay in Berlin, I relocated to Hanover. In June 2022, I founded a theatre studio there for Ukrainian refugees, aiming to help youth overcome emotional challenges and address war traumas. During our performances, we raised funds to support children from Mariupol who had lost their parents. However, constant uncertainty about the future, coupled with a lack of stability and immersion in a completely unfamiliar environment, left me emotionally unstable and unmotivated.

Upon discovering Culture Helps' individual support programme, I found some hope and successfully received the grant, enabling me to address my mental

health needs. During that time, I missed the seaside reminiscent of my home in Mariupol by the Black Sea, so I decided to follow my tradition and travelled to Egypt. Being there, I could not only find the peacefulness but also a much-needed healing experience for my mind and soul. With the support of Culture Helps, I received a vital boost, allowing me to recharge and also gain new motivation for my artistic work. Upon returning, I premiered performances titled "Goodbye to Arms" and "Wings" with renewed enthusiasm.

In March 2024, I opened Kultur Haus in Hanover, which became a community space of Ukrainian and German cultures. It quickly became a space for community engagement, fostering collaboration among diverse artistic and cultural endeavours. There are also some more new exciting adventures on the horizon, thanks to my stronger mental resilience and Culture Helps.

Anton Telbizov
*Participant in the Individual Grants Programme of Culture Helps
Theatre director (Mariupol)*

cross-cultural learning a journey in global collaboration

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Working with zusa in Tandem Amwaj was an opportunity for me to develop my career as a project and cultural manager through a learning process that began from the initial discussions to the project's fruition. Attending meetings in Sofia and Berlin allowed me to connect with more cultural actors from Europe and MENA regions, exchanging our organisations culture on a larger scale. This networking greatly aided in advancing my startup career, providing opportunities for sharing and participating in events related to the creative and cultural economy as AGYLE and Impact Europe conferences.

The spirit of sharing and networking that zusa embodies left a lasting impression on me, inspiring me to adopt it even on a smaller scale with the Al-Badil team. The fluidity and effective management of problems and unexpected challenges fostered an environment of teamwork and equal partnership. Working with zusa not only enhanced my professional skills but also enriched my personal growth, broadening my perspective and opening doors to new opportunities.

The collaborative approach encouraged by zusa has transformed how I establish projects and partnerships, emphasizing the importance of communication, flexibility, and mutual respect.

The impact of working with zusa has been transformative, both on our organisation and on me personally. It has provided invaluable learning experiences, expanded professional networks, and instilled a mindset of collaboration and adaptability that continues to guide our endeavours. zusa's influence extends far beyond the confines of any single project, shaping the way we work and interact with others in the cultural and creative sphere.

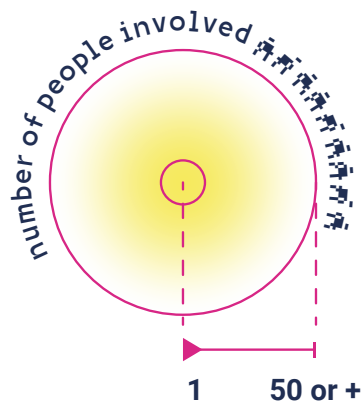
Dhafer Amine Nasraoui
Tandem Amwaj Project Manager
Al-Badil alternative culture (Tunisia)

Credits: Mohamad El-Hadidi



23

I try to spread my influence on different parts of the world. This influence has many shapes, and I do it in collaboration with partners with various capacities. I sometimes work directly with individual artists, which is awesome! Other times, I establish partnerships with existing organisations in different regions. That can be challenging sometimes but also fun! I also strongly believe that borders are transparent obstacles and there is no limitation for transferring human knowledge.



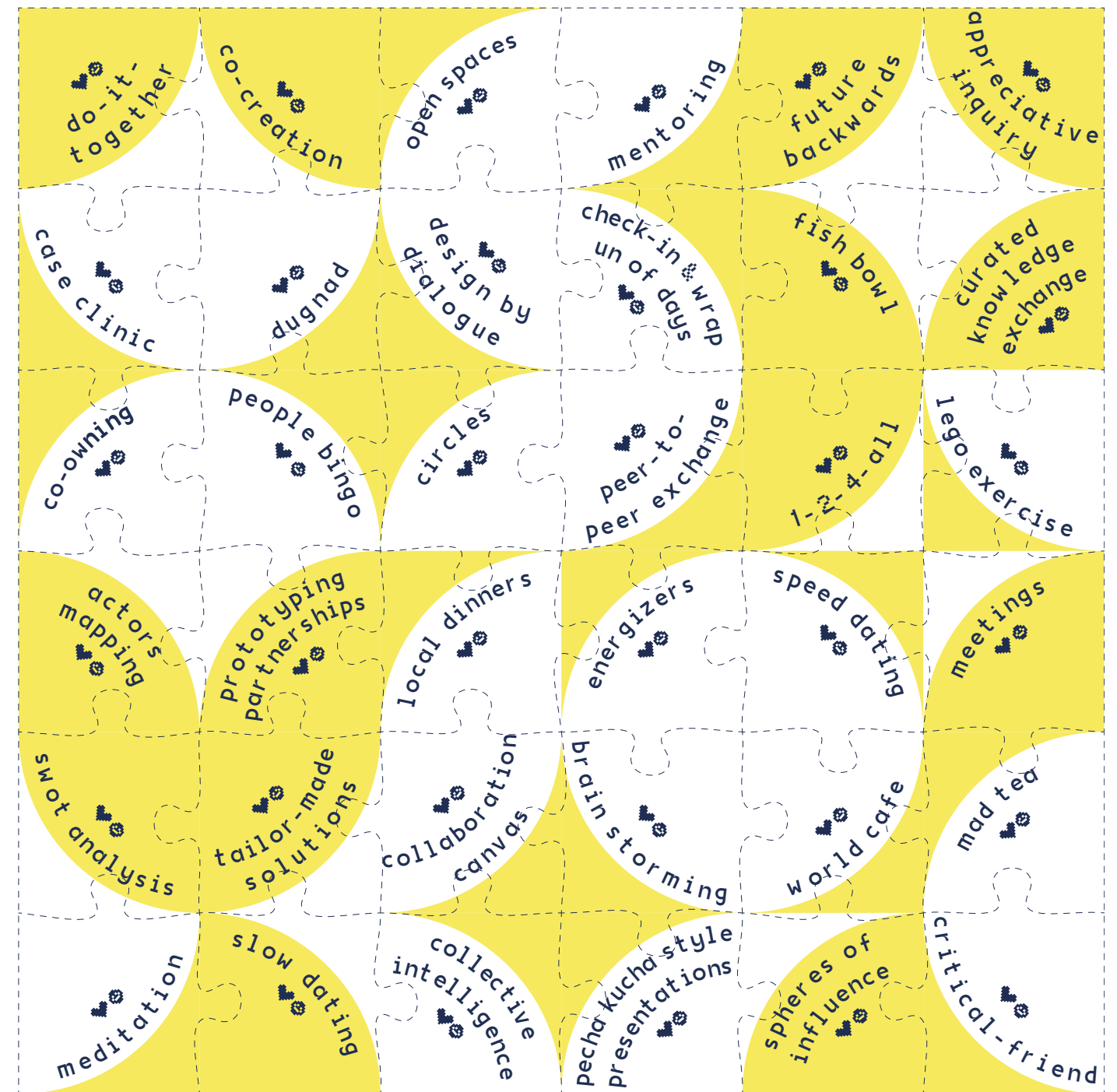
Let's play! methods and tools of collaboration

Methods and tools of collaboration are the way I do the work, I have a playful personality! I'm all about keeping things light and fun. I love to joke around, and I'm never one to turn down a good laugh and create smiles on people's faces. Whether it's breaking ice exercises or speed dating, I'm always up for some fun. I tend to approach life with a sense of curiosity and spontaneity, always looking for new adventures and opportunities to have a good time.

Let's resemble the puzzle together and discuss the methods and tools we use to make our learning processes memorable.

press here and play...★

Credits: Puzzle
Created by Nico Igna Rom'an





zusa in numbers

budget 2023

zusa in numbers

budget 2023

minutes spent in meetings
52.235
(46 days)

budget for 2023
€943.520,93

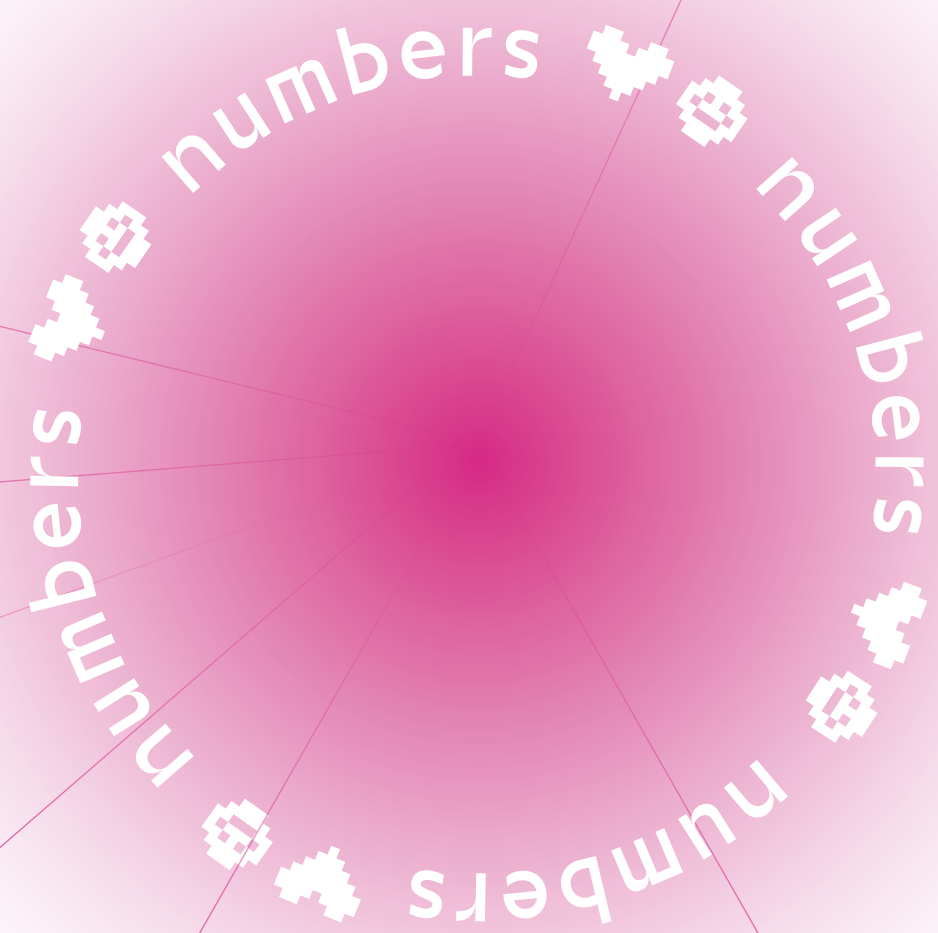
webinars, activities, workshops, trainings
15

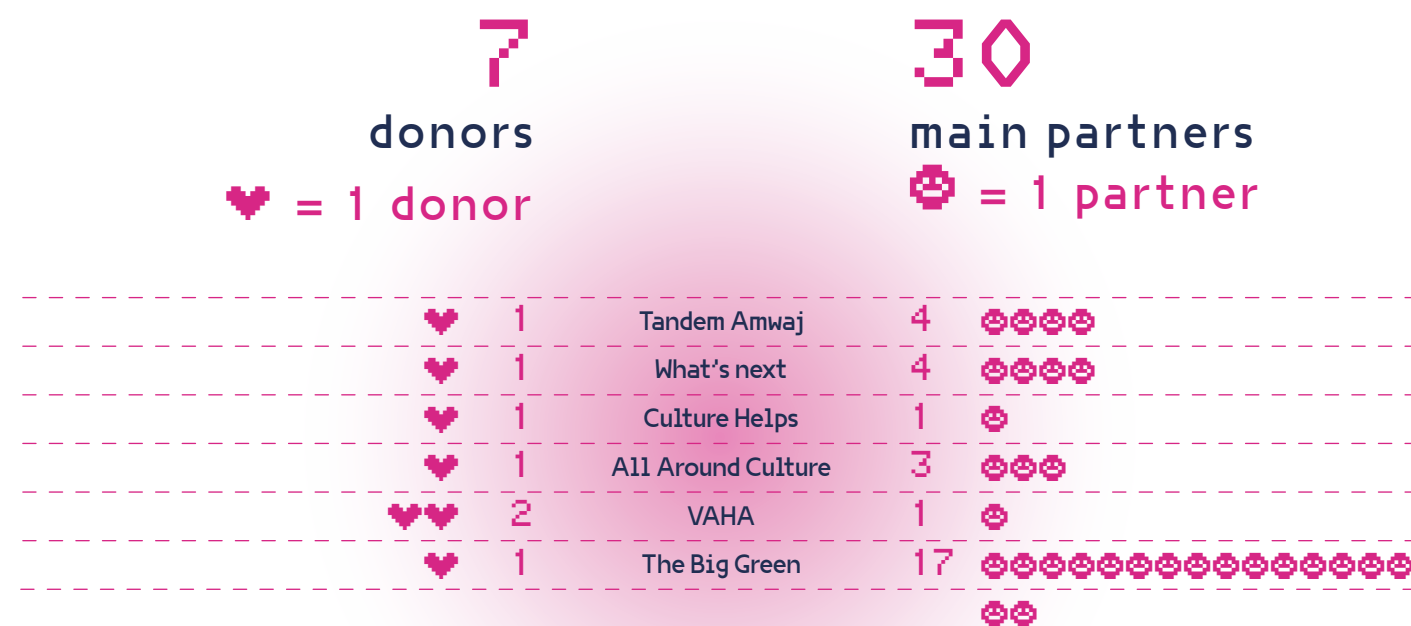
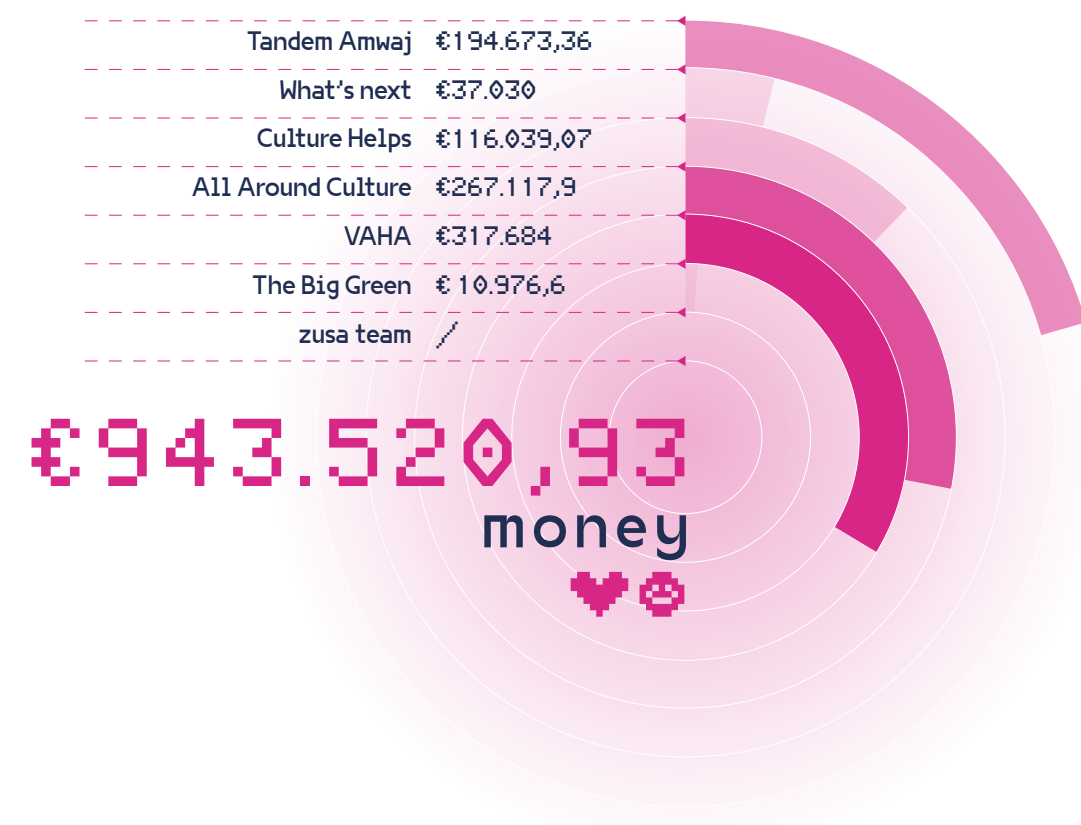
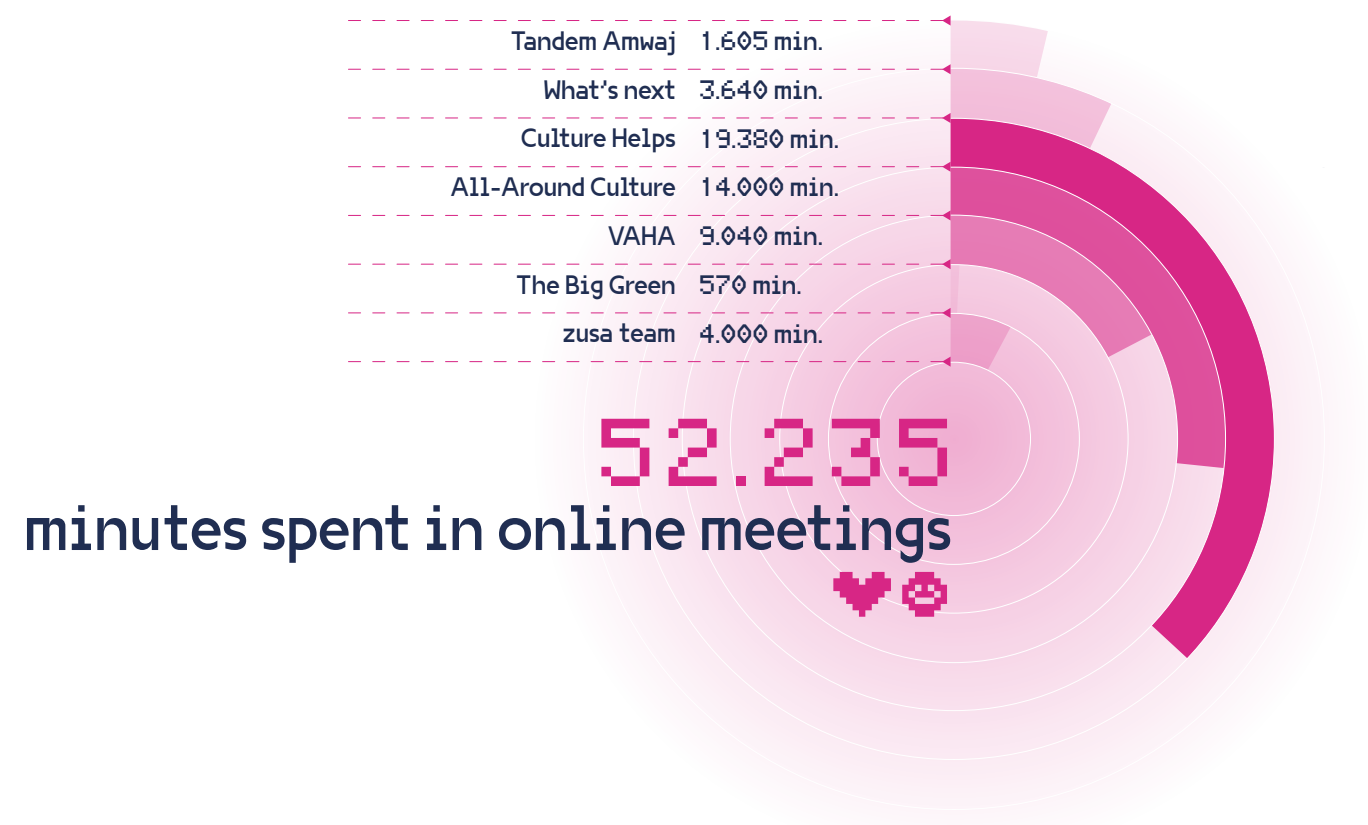
partners
30

donors
7

projects / programmes
6

team members in berlin office
17





Learning profile

During my journey, I met people who were a source of inspiration for me. One of them is Samantha Slade, the author of the "Going Horizontal" book. I had the chance to meet her in person and learn how to apply horizontal management structure in the work environment. I would like share with you my learning experience by reflecting it on my journey which includes a lot of ups and downs besides making mistakes and learning from them.



Working alone was not the best idea I had. it was hard for me as I'm based in Berlin to know about all the different context in all countries I worked in, and I found it hard to reach communities there and directly work with them. So, I started to work with partners in various geographical zones, which had significant positive results and I learned from it that collaboration is important for effective sustainable work.

When Covid-19 pandemic started I was confused like everyone else, I was trying to build up mechanisms to cope with the new situation, dealing with online environment and hype-reality. That pressured me and built up my anxiety and stress levels, and I felt low and uncomfortable. So, I started taking care of my physical and psychological health, which made me more resilience and adaptive to the rapid changes were happening around me.

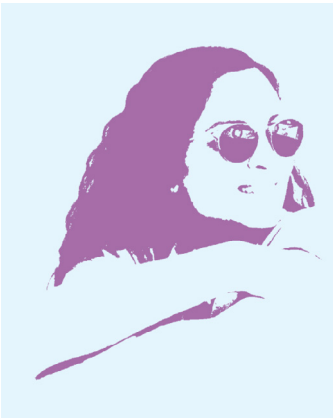
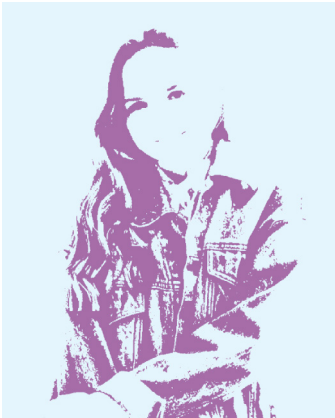
I am a hard worker, I like to play different roles in the organisation, and sometimes this made me overwhelmed with all the tasks I had to do. When this started to impact my life-work balance, I realised that I had to make a change and be more realistic in my estimation of work tasks and the time I need to fulfil them.

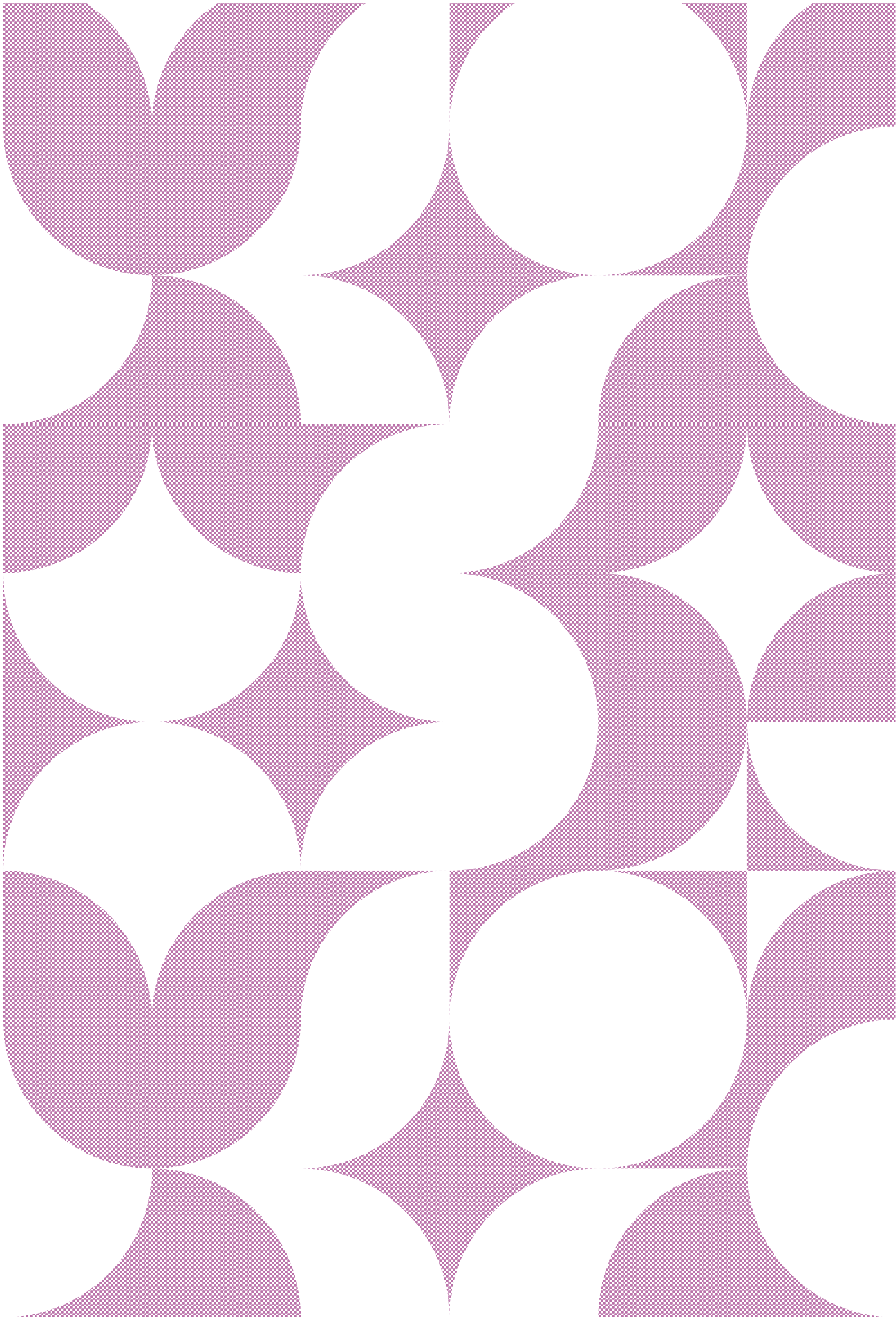
During Covid times my new workspaces were Zoom and Miro. After the pandemic passed, I kept prioritising these platforms for regular meetings. I completely ignored that human interaction is a very authentic and unique. Since then, I always remind myself to meet people face to face, and choose in person communication, when possible, to live the full moment with smells and smiles.

Take a break and reflect: Learning is a continuous process that requires patience and delegation. For effective learning experience it is important to take a break from time to time, look inside, around and reflect. I understand now that it is very important to look to the past with a critical eye, analyse the present and be optimistic about the future.

#myfamily

I have worked with talented, hardworking team. This made my life sometimes easier and other times harder; we went through good days and bad days, we shared moments of lost and gain. I would not be who I am today without their belief in me and our mutual vision to make the art of collaboration possible. Many thanks to Adina, Bengi, Egle, Franziska, Olha, Jotham, Henrieke, Kasia, Rejane, Mohab, Nataliia, Sarah, Serra, Sengül, Selim, Syrine, Silvana and Uta.





goodbye 🍷🍷🍷🍷

My journey has been an enriching rollercoaster, filled with full spectrum of emotions. It has been rewarding to share these moments with the team and all other great people I meet wherever I go. The world cannot be a better space without our hard work, and good spirits. I hope that what we are building today will make the world a more inclusive place for future generations, inspiring positive change and lasting impact.

