

# LIVING IN A FRAGILE AND DYNAMIC TERRITORY: THE CONTRIBUTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND ARTISTIC MEDIATION TO THE APPROPRIATION OF NEW WAYS OF LIVING IN COASTAL AREAS

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**Abstract.** The research focuses on identifying the levers and scope for progress of environmental and artistic mediation in raising awareness among users to changes in the way coastal areas are inhabited. The research is based on a contemporary and forward-looking approach, grounded on the heritage approach and the memory of practices in the area to encourage citizens to take action concerning environmental issues.

Observing and understanding of the landscape help to change our relationship with the world by rethinking the relationships between living and non-living beings. The contribution of knowledge and representations that promote awareness are at the heart of the political recomposition of the Anthropocene.

This research is part of a multi-scalar and transdisciplinary spatial dynamic, touching on local cultural policies society and academia. The commitment of local and institutional players to the approach bears witness to a participatory and situated research, capable of perpetuating links between the arts, sciences and society in a co-production of knowledge.

**Keywords:** Raising awareness - Environment - Landscape - Arts & Sciences - Coastline

## Introduction

Our initial research question is based on the ability of observing and understanding the landscape, as a reflection of the evolution of spatial practices over time, to contribute to changing our relationship with the world. We postulate that the contribution of knowledge and the nourishment of representations contribute to the awareness of individuals. Combined with experimentation and active discovery, they encourage people to take on board the messages and get involved in environmental issues linked to the necessary changes in ways of living.

In the current context of fragility of coastal areas linked to global change, it is necessary to make the dynamics of the landscapes in which they live understandable to as many people as possible. In contrast to catastrophist or ex nihilo approaches, mediation based on inhabited territories that is accessible and sensitive proposes the creation of a common heritage shared by residents and visitors alike.

We have chosen to mobilise the experiential and playful approaches as the basis for our empirical research, by re-examining the messages, the methods of transmission and awareness-raising, and the formats for disseminating information. The aim of exploring the effects of these different approaches on the perception of the landscape is to reach as many coastal users and residents as possible, and to encourage them to renew their vision of the world around them. To achieve this, we have developed a number of environmental and cultural mediation systems accessible to a wide range of audiences.

The challenge of transmitting thematic and educational messages via media for promoting landscape heritage has led us to question the systems for producing scientific and interpretative data and the relevance of their distribution scales. The effectiveness of local project dynamics, driven by bottom-up and/or top-down initiatives, is also a central analysis criterion in our experiment.

The diversity of the scenarios aims to enrich the resources traditionally used in environmental education, by highlighting the potential for raising awareness of the artistic approach through aesthetic emotion. We are interested in the emotional approach and the cognitive processes it generates, particularly in the processing of information likely to trigger civic action.

The aim of this research is to identify and evaluate the levers and scope for progress of environmental and artistic mediation in raising user awareness of changes in coastal practices and ways of living sustainably. The proximity felt by the population with the landscape, whether aesthetic, cultural and identity-related or affective and sensitive, gives it a strong potential for raising awareness. We have sought to identify the most effective means of encouraging a broad-based public response through raising awareness of the future effects of global change on the coastline.

## Materials and Methods

Our case study, developed within the Heritage and Archaeology department of *Sète agglomération Méditerranée* (SAM), looks at ways of raising awareness among local populations and users of coastal areas of the changing ways in which coastal areas are inhabited. The project is likely to be of interest to those involved in regional planning, who are increasingly involved in implementing public policies aimed at changing the way these sensitive areas are understood and used.

The challenges of bringing science and society together require a locally rooted geographical and social context in order to improve the ability of university research to find viable solutions that contribute to the habitability of the coastal area of the Thau Basin. This contrasting area, which is both fragile and dynamic from a geomorphological and climatic point of view, has a growing population due to its strong economic and tourist appeal. The issues of acceptability are therefore at the heart of the objectives of disseminating a culture of risk inherent in the public service missions carried out by local authorities.

The notion of the spirit of place (*genius loci*) and the artistic expression of the relationship with the landscape are expressed through residencies for visual artists hosted by the local authority's heritage network facilities. In this way, they renew the treatment of their message around the key themes of the evolution of landscapes, skills, agricultural practices and the relationship with the environment as a resource since Antiquity. This heritage and landscape approach to the area and its evolution implies a cross-disciplinary, multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary enhancement, particularly through the promotion of geo-heritage, which contributes to the culture of risk in the age of the Anthropocene [11].

The Heritage and Archaeology Department offers artists in residence the opportunity to express a sensitive and unique relationship with the coastline and its landscapes. We have identified the *MangeNuage* sailing circus company to develop the *Messagers du littoral* (Coastal messengers) project, our case study. Their proposal carries a strong message about soft mobility, with the use of wind as propulsion energy, and a reflection on the footprint we leave on the coastline, in the way the ship lands on the beach but also in the image of lightness conveyed by the aerial gymnastic apparatus (trapeze, fabric, etc.). As part of the Arts & Sciences residency, the project will be enriched by a scientific and educational approach to landscape and geoarchaeological mediation.

The methods used are based on the human and social sciences. Theoretical reflection is based on the concepts of inhabitation [16], environmental education [14] and the ecomuseum approach [17] in order to address the transdisciplinary issue of raising awareness of changes in coastal practices. We carried out empirical work based on interviews and participant observation [4], with the aim of understanding the day-to-day relationship between individuals and changes in the surrounding environment. This methodological approach aims to fuel the representations of users of coastal areas to enable them to make informed choices in terms of adapting their ways of living.

Initially, we felt it necessary to take stock of the situation by collecting and analysing qualitative data on how landscapes are perceived by their users, using an approach that was sensitive, memorial and forward-looking. The results were then used as a basis for the development of media and mediation tools, the messages of which contribute to social representations of the environment and climate change issues. Finally, concrete information was gathered through participant observation, with the aim of experimenting with the Arts & Sciences approach on coastal fragility and the impact of our use of space on the evolution of landscapes (figure 1). These data have contributed to the development of an intervention methodology for use by local authorities as well as scientific and artistic groups that can be mobilised in projects combining the arts, sciences and society (figure 4).

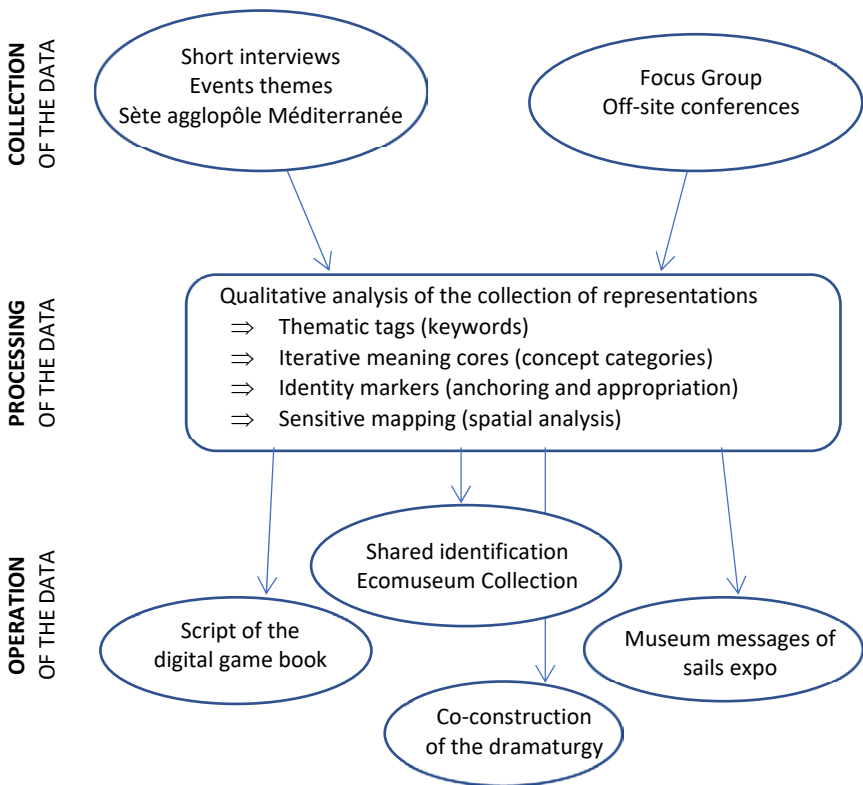


Figure 1 – Qualitative data itinerary: collection - processing – operation.

## Results

A methodological experiment was set up to bring together people involved in environmental education and performing arts. A technical and financial partnership with SAM's Heritage and Archaeology Department enabled several creative residencies to be organised with the *MangeNuage* Company. At the end of two years' work, the show *Ressac*, inspired by the questioning of the relationship that contemporary societies have with the surrounding environment and the coastal space in particular, was presented on the lagoon shores of the Thau Basin. Scientific and environmental mediation tools were also tested as part of multidisciplinary theme days. On these occasions, live performance and active education have been combined to spread a common message using artistic, entertaining and educational approaches. Reaching out to individuals while arousing their curiosity is as much a challenge, in seeking to link affect and intellect, as it is a powerful potential for appropriating the challenges of changing the way we practise a historically fragile and dynamic coastal area.

The framework of a feasibility study is set out to define the mixed Arts & Sciences creation as a tool to serve the project and the company, but also to promote and enhance the approach within the local authority. The format of this residency is atypical, at the interface between the methods of artistic creation, cultural policies, heritage enhancement and environmental awareness. The aim of this preliminary study is to analyse the relevance of the project and to examine its feasibility in artistic, media, technical and financial terms. The company's participation in the *Escale à Sète* event then provides an opportunity to publicise the project as it unfolds. The event provided an opportunity for experimentation and creativity, with the clown meeting the audience and working on his posture, a conference-show on the theme of the surf, a presentation of the boat-stage project and the creation of a model to be used as a basis for the scenography, and a presentation of the doctoral research project.

Following on from this rich collective production, work is being carried out with the actor and director to frame and explore the clown's posture in greater depth. Carried out as part of interactive semi-directive interviews, the elements of reflection contributed by the artists and the researcher will be used to fuel a cross-disciplinary issue. The clown's offbeat stance will play down a guilt-inducing approach to climate change, while at the same time establishing a thematic framework that will then simply be evoked in the show. The naiveté of the character makes him endearing, and the audience identifies with him and follows his emotional path, taking on board his candour and wonder at the beauty of nature, his lack of understanding of the phenomena that govern hazards, his anger at his inability to control them, his guilty despair at the destruction of resources, and finally his resilience in the hope of another possible world (Figure 2). This stance therefore has great potential for mobilising the public's representational system, without having any prescriptive effect on the perception of the issues at stake and the choices made in the face of global change.

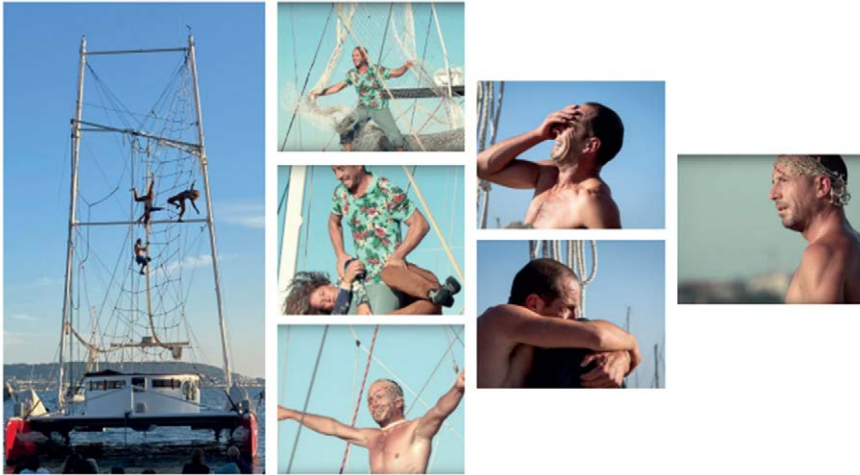


Figure 2 – The clown and emotions in the show *Ressac - Messagers du littoral* (Coastal messengers).

In the same dynamic of creating shared design spaces, an exercise in comparing the dramaturgy with the research orientations and the messages of the mediation devices (table 1) is carried out first by the researcher and then discussed with the artistic team. At this point, the dramaturgy is in an intermediate phase, where the narrative is imbued with strong conceptual and representational imagery that resonates with the scientific and media intentions. This phase offers rich and particularly inspiring material for the Arts & Sciences approach. It must, however, take place before the directing of the actor to inspire it, while leaving room for improvisation, as a space for the artists to appropriate the conceptual approach.

Table 1 – Extracts from the dramaturgy/research crossover table.

<p><b>III bis: The clown's journey</b></p> <p><i>duration : 3 to 5 min</i></p>	<p><u><i>Narration :</i></u>          Between here and elsewhere, the journey. But why all this movement?          How can you accept a conference with activity and movement in the background?          Intolerable! Jean Pink goes off to demand that all activity cease on this boat...          How will the clown find his way in the midst of all these possibilities? But when he finally arrived near the boat, just as he was about to ask for calm, a net fell on him and knocked him unconscious.</p>	<p>Appearance of <b>anger in the clown</b>          =&gt; Link between <b>environmental psychology and the sociology of commitment</b>:          - affects/emotions generate or inhibit action          - fear or anger + hope = action</p> <p>The net that knocks the clown out materialises the unexpected <b>power of wild nature and the fragility of man</b> in the face of the natural elements, despite the processes of anthropisation and environmental control.          =&gt; Link with theme 2 of the exhibition:          - places man in an ecosystem          - highlights the notion of risk</p>
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The educational offer has been developed by *SAM's* Heritage and Archaeology department and aims to pass on a message to users of coastal areas. Playful and educational scenarios help to raise awareness of the richness and fragility of these areas, which are subject to the impact of human settlement patterns. The use of geomorphological, archaeological, historical, geographical and naturalist data reflects the trans-disciplinary approach to heritage used to design the content of the displays. In order to reach a wide audience, mainly teenagers and young adults, a range of scientific and environmental media have been developed (Figure 3):

- a travelling thematic exhibition on the fragility of coastal areas for families, focusing on the challenges of living sustainably in coastal areas. Made up of 3 items printed on Optimist sail, it can also be combined with a round table debate as a time for discussion and citizen mediation on future changes in coastal practices;
- a "mystery trunk": an educational and fun way of solving riddles for a young audience (8-11 years old) based on the escape game principle, the scenario proposes a mission to be solved in a limited time, based on historical content highlighting the riches of the Mediterranean basin. It looks at the issues involved in preserving the natural resources that have contributed to the development of human societies along the coast, and highlights the cause-and-effect relationship between man's actions and the evolution of coastal landscapes;
- a "book where you are the heroine" type of digital game: a fun device for teenagers (aged 13 and over). Based on a multiple-choice scenario, it follows the adventures of an environmental campaigner against a backdrop of international lobbying intrigue. It highlights the impact of knowledge transfer on people's ability to take action. This medium allows us to move from the individual level, by reflecting on our personal practices, to the collective level by highlighting the notion of the Common Good, embodied by the environmental resources and scientific knowledge in the scenario.



Figure 3 – "Messagers du littoral" (Coastal Messengers) project scientific mediation tools.

One of the main lessons to be learned from this interdisciplinary experiment is the need to adapt the relationship with time, which varies greatly depending on the players involved. Indeed, appropriating the messages and issues through an immersive experience shared by the various partners and stages in the process (Figure 4) is essential to the development of a credible and reliable Arts & Sciences project, under conditions that are comfortable for all the participants.

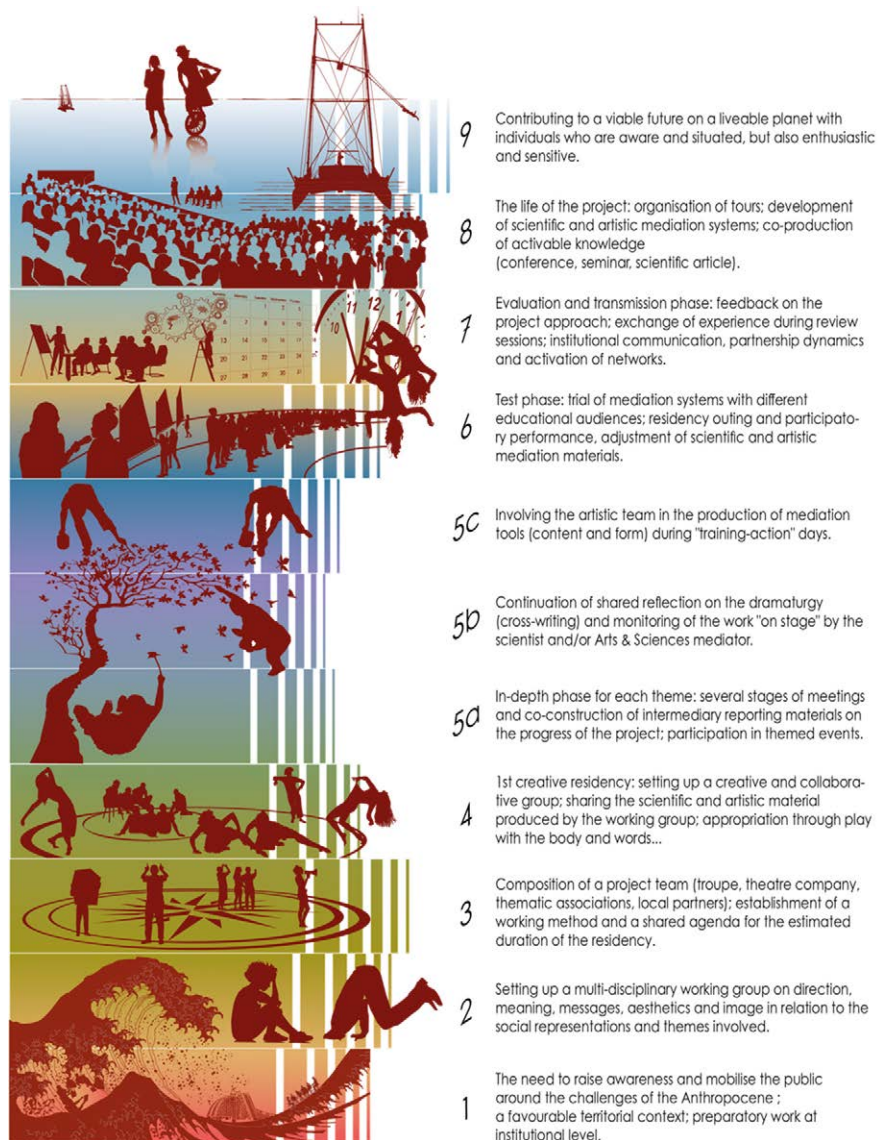


Figure 4 – Methodology Arts & Sciences "Messagers du littoral" (Coastal Messengers) project 2021-2023



## Discussion

Firstly, we identify three levers for activating a citizen mobilisation through environmental mediation. Firstly, the heritage approach is based on knowledge of geomorphological processes and the capacity to adapt to a resource environment that is mobile and changing, in line with historical climate trends. This memory of how human societies have used the land since the Neolithic period is a valuable asset in the context of adapting ways of living in coastal areas to the effects of global change. It helps to lighten the burden of constraint in the eyes of users by promoting the transmission of a heritage of how to live on coastal shores [11]. Observing the world in which we live sharpens our curiosity about the processes and stories that have helped to shape it. This understanding of phenomena, supported by the "PPF" (Present-Past-Future) approach, enables us to look to the future as a continuity, a creative process in the making, to be welcomed with enthusiasm [7]. The potential of environmental mediation in raising awareness of changes in ways of living revolves around an understanding of the heritage of landscapes and their evolution. It thus contributes to the appropriation of the notion of Common Good through that of the collective cultural heritage of spatial practices by coastal peoples.

The second lever is the pedagogical intention, which places active discovery as the driving force behind the appropriation of content and messages. The stages of this early learning approach are based on experimentation, taking time to build awareness, explore the subject in greater depth and then pass it on. Immersive situations in the field, in action, form the basis of the active pedagogy that developed during the twentieth century [6]. The playful experience is particularly conducive to manipulating concepts and reformulating them in a recreational setting. We have associated with this the objective of feeding social representations of the environment and landscapes as the foundation of the environmental mediation approach. The aim is to deconstruct stereotyped or fantasised visions of a natural environment that is far removed from users' everyday lives, and to encourage a vision of the world as a heritage shared by humans and non-humans on which it is possible to take positive action [8].

Finally, the third and last lever is the role of emotions in the perception of issues linked to global change and in their ability to influence the mobilisation of citizens in favour of a change in coastal space practices. The mobilisation of fear or anger without any correlation to hope generates eco-anxiety, which represents a risk for the mental health and well-being of individuals. So the urgency of helping to trigger pro-environmental behaviour must not mask the psychosocial issues at stake and the journalistic and media excesses denounced by research in sociology [3] and environmental psychology [10]. We contrast eco-anxiety with the strong potential of positive emotions in their ability to generate a collective dynamic of cooperation and commitment to pro-environmental behaviour that is a source of well-being [10]. The sense of wonder generated by a connection with nature is central to our experience of the Arts & Sciences approach.

We have identified elements that trigger this emotion in the landscape immersion offered by the *MangeNuage* company. The shift into dream and wonder is conducive to "situated wonder" [11]. What's more, aesthetic emotion encourages

pro-social and pro-environmental behaviour by raising awareness of the political issues at stake through committed artistic creation, embodied by the figure of the clown in *Ressac*. The reflections generated by the show mobilise a representational system that opens up and is enriched, fostering the capacity to act and the ability to make choices as conscious, situated individuals [12].

Secondly, we outline a cross-disciplinary approach - from the point of view of the project approach used in our case study - combining the arts, sciences and society. Fields of activity with methodological and experiential practices that may seem far apart can come together in experimentation and the co-construction of accessible and shared knowledge. This approach to the co-production of knowledge is part of the quest for horizontality that underpins popular education. In this respect, Patrick Geddes is a forerunner in areas linked to regional planning, through the training of individuals and their relationship with the world to which they belong. The academic openness and disciplinary decompartmentalisation that he demonstrated over a century ago invite us to rediscover a civic capacity as part of a process of appropriating our landscape heritage.

The ability of environmental and artistic mediation to recreate links between individuals is illustrated in a remobilisation of citizens that is both individual and collective. The intention is at the political level, in particular in a form of questioning of the social contract expressed by the crisis of representation [2]. The pragmatic approach leads to the identification of a local scale of intervention that can accommodate concrete initiatives conducive to a change in our relationship to property and the related mechanisms of appropriation of environmental resources. Reappropriating the practices of space as a common heritage or inheritance has the potential to bring people together around a shared and sharable resource. If heritage can become the foundation on which the ecological and democratic transition expected by the 21st century can be built, the relevance of the territorial scale as a place or interface for implementing alternatives to the current model needs to be reconsidered. The co-production of knowledge has a strong potential for both disciplinary and relational horizontality, in a sensitive relationship with others. A geographical and social space in which to share knowledge and emotions, a space in which to "build a community" today, can be provided by institutions or members of civil society who are behind local initiatives that function as "laboratories". In this way, the impact of pooling individual commitments in the production of the collective helps to broaden the present and its capacity to intervene in a future that is being written on a daily basis, as form of "resistance to the thinning of the world" [5].

## Conclusion

The institutional and financial framework being developed in public cultural policies is helping to support and accompany artistic creation projects at different territorial levels, public/private partnerships and contributions from non-institutional players (foundations, civil society). This process has the potential to involve local populations and users in the direction of cultural policies. Ensuring that forward-looking landscapes are taken into account in regional development projects on a long-term basis, and disseminating this information to local residents,

is part of a process of awareness-raising and transparency that is developing in response to the strong demand for exemplary public action. In this respect, local authorities have the capacity to generate changes in practices by generalising and widely disseminating exemplary approaches within the population, particularly in terms of spatial planning [11].

The relationship with time structures our operational stance to the arts-sciences-society approach around the transdisciplinary of the issue of Sustainable Living in the Anthropocene era. The 21st century, marked by the effects of global change, calls for the deconstruction of corporatism through the pooling of multidisciplinary viewpoints. The formulation of controversies brings together the dynamics of action and encourages the mobilisation of citizens around the common challenges of the Earth's habitability [8]. Fighting against the acceleration of time [13] is necessary here to build common narratives, share methods and harmonise objectives in an "ecology of practices" [15] towards the composition of shared and "actionable" knowledge [1].

The artistic approach and aesthetic emotion possess this capacity for slowing down, a source of complicity between individuals and between generations. Through the postures of the clown and the aerial circus artists, we identify dreams and laughter as a means of decentring, of extricating ourselves from the present, from a functional and sometimes sombre immediacy, so that we can project ourselves fearlessly into the future. Aesthetic emotion can become a powerful political lever, provided that artistic aesthetics is placed alongside other aesthetics, political and scientific [9]. Political and committed art thus represents a potential for sensitive citizen mobilisation based on the immaterial, capable of opposing the model of the accumulation of wealth and personal enrichment.

When local residents take up issues of social and environmental justice, they make them a priority for public and civic action. These issues mobilise and unite citizens who want to take action and make their voices heard by public authorities. Relaying this post-modern narrative in favour of the Common Good is neither dangerous nor surreal, unlike keeping it quiet. It is a political choice in the sense that it expresses a vision of the world and a proposal for the future of people who share common conditions of existence.

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