

Activating Urban Imaginaries through Art

Implementing design recommendations

Reflective Activity

What?

12 posters, including artist commentary

Why?

To activate imagination and catalyze conversations about urban innovation

How?

Facilitators of meetings or workshops should develop questions about the artwork appropriate for the context of their meeting. Examples include:

What does this artwork make you feel and think?

What stories are being told about urban futures?

What stories are being told about the past?

What values could drive urban transformation?

**Guidance: Each poster included in this section is an invitation to imagine alternative frames for urban innovation.*

We invite you to reflect on the artwork included here to explore the role of values in urban innovation. Beginning with the three discursive practices presented in the study – imagining futures, remembering the past, and sharing power – take a moment to consider the kind of values present in your own community’s efforts.

Introduction

The study presented in the accompanying publication illustrates a novel approach to urban innovation that we call a Values-Based Urban Living Laboratory (VBULL). It demonstrates the importance of imagination, memory, and active power-sharing in achieving sustainable, community-supported innovation, and it provides ample evidence for the centrality of artists and artistic processes in the work. In realizing a VBULL, artists are catalysts for imagination; they add layers of critical remembering, and they communicate possible pathways for sharing power.

The role that art plays in urban innovation is not just representational. Far more than pretty pictures, the artists engaged in this effort created the aesthetic and affective platform for meaningful participation. They did this by creating a space for collective imagination, or what is called civic imagination.¹ This active imagination, shared with a community of people, serves to bind different stakeholder groups and communities together with common purpose.

Artistic practices of all sorts are emerging in urban innovation settings. Urban comics and graphic narratives are growing in popularity as well as recognition in a range of interdisciplinary formations. A series of recent studies use it as a referential tool to understand the representation of cities and the shaping of urban spatialities,² as well as the reimagining and rethinking of cities' materialities,³ in new territories or geographies.⁴

ArtiViStory Collective

The ArtiViStory Collective contributes to traditions of urban comics. It is a community of local artists that emerged through the design process of the OurCluj VBULL, a multi-sectoral “living laboratory” that seeks to activate the values of trust and care for outcomes such as enhanced well-being. Working together, artists documented the unseen, providing creative mediums for ideas that expand on the rational discourse of traditional research by emphasizing the affective and shared insights of urban innovation. When ArtiViStory first got involved in the study, the intention was to identify the invisible relational aspects of innovation, the elements of the creative process and values that never make it into the hyper-rational frame of innovation, and make them visible and felt.

ArtiViStory’s practice started with a factual documentation of events, from roundtables and conferences to workshops with Cluj-Napoca stakeholders. The artists participated in several trainings to get accustomed to the jargon used in public policy conversations and social innovation for an accurate depiction of the discussions. A workflow was established that included specific terms and actions for pre-documentation and post-documentation up to the delivery of the artworks. The artists attended physical and online meetings, gatherings, and events, as well as online interviews with OurCluj stakeholders. They then engaged in self-reflexive analysis, further teasing out themes captured in the art.

To illustrate the process, a selection of artworks generated during the study are represented here, accompanied with artists’ commentary. They include artists’ interpretations of the interviews with the city stakeholders, the logic model for the OurCluj VBULL, and key values observed in the design of the VBULL.

Words by: Barbara Bulc, Eric Gordon, Anamaria Tomiuc, Alice Iliescu, Daniel Popescu

Artwork and commentary by ArtiViStory Collective: Evelina-Maria Grigorean, Lucian Barbu, Melinda Ureczki Lázár, Teodora Predescu, Horațiu Coman, Erdély Bálint, Sebastian Ștefan

¹Henry Jenkins, Gabriel Peters-Lazaro, and Sangita Shresthova, *Popular Culture and the Civic Imagination: Case Studies of Creative Social Change* (New York University Press, 2019).

²Dominic Davies, *Urban comics: Infrastructure and the global city in contemporary graphic narratives* (Routledge, 2019).

³Benjamin Franse, *Visible cities, global comics: Urban images and spatial form* (University Press of Mississippi, 2019).

⁴Giada Peterle, *Comics as a Research Practice: Drawing Narrative Geographies Beyond the Frame* (Routledge, 2021).



Melinda Ureczki Lázár

ArtiViStory Collective

“

This image is an interactive interpretation of all the interviews I participated in. My approach was to focus on working with keywords – words that were frequently used by the stakeholders. The keywords represent concepts that, once brought together, can generate a mechanism of change. The puzzle has two sides. On the main side (the backside), each keyword is written out and represented through a small, iconic image that best describes it. If you can identify the corresponding image to the right keyword, you can get the complete image of OurCluj. The most frequent keywords from the interviews were presented in different visual formats throughout the project. What struck me most was how one word alone can have so many different interpretations. This “private language” provides an opportunity to reinterpret and rethink the words themselves, and the interactive game provides an open space to explore and interpret the keywords together from different perspectives.

- ☐ Imagining Futures
- ☒ Remembering the Past
- ☐ Sharing Power

Teodora Predescu

ArtiViStory Collective

“

These images are part of a series, a synopsis of all the interviews I participated in. The series consists of two categories: main topics (trust, collaboration, wellbeing, and friendly environments) and main problems (named the “Problematic Monsters”: bureaucracy, distrust, ignoring issues, and unfriendly living spaces). The first category describes the most common subjects mentioned by the stakeholders, those that have been brought up in multiple interviews by multiple stakeholders, while the second category focuses on the issues they have encountered. Overall, this series was generated through observational interpretation. I highlight and creatively interpret the most prevalent subjects offered by the stakeholders during their interviews.

- **Imagining Futures**
- Remembering the Past
- Sharing Power



LET'S
MAKE
THINGS

COMMON VISION
WELLNESS EMPOWERMENT
INNOVATION

YOUR FUTURE

INVEST
IN
YOUTH

Wellness

COLLABORATION

LEAP

CONNECTION

CONSTANT INFORMATION FLOW

MEND

WE ARE A BIG FAMILY
CONSTANT LEARNING PROCESS

WHAT IS BROKEN

Sebastian Ştefan ArtiViStory Collective

“

I imagined the initiative as a boat because there is a clear starting point and a destination. In order to keep the boat moving forward, certain roles need to be filled. There is a philosophy of sea travel: you have to reconcile your past mistakes to get back on track, to move forward.

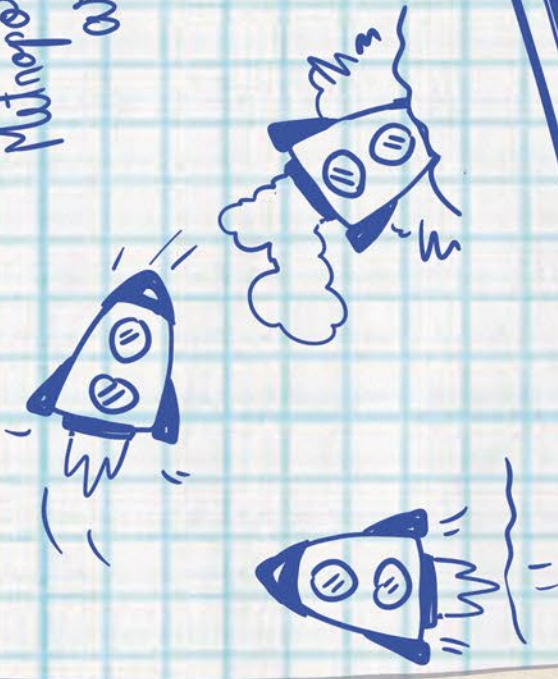
- **Imagining Futures**
- Remembering the Past
- Sharing Power

"measure simple things and put them into perspective, it's not rocket science"

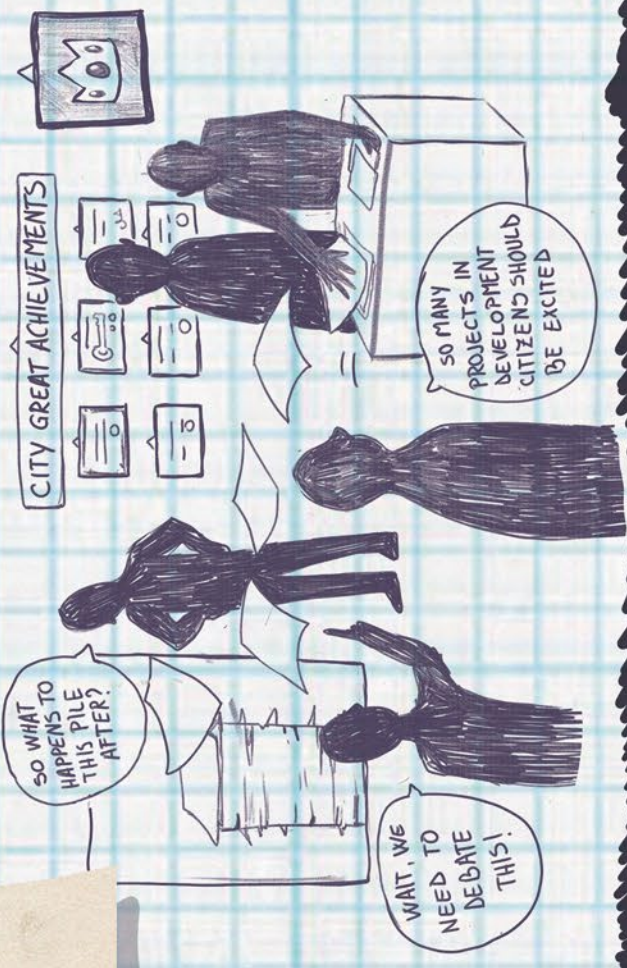
Trust



Cluj and Metropolitan area



Transparency



Digitalization



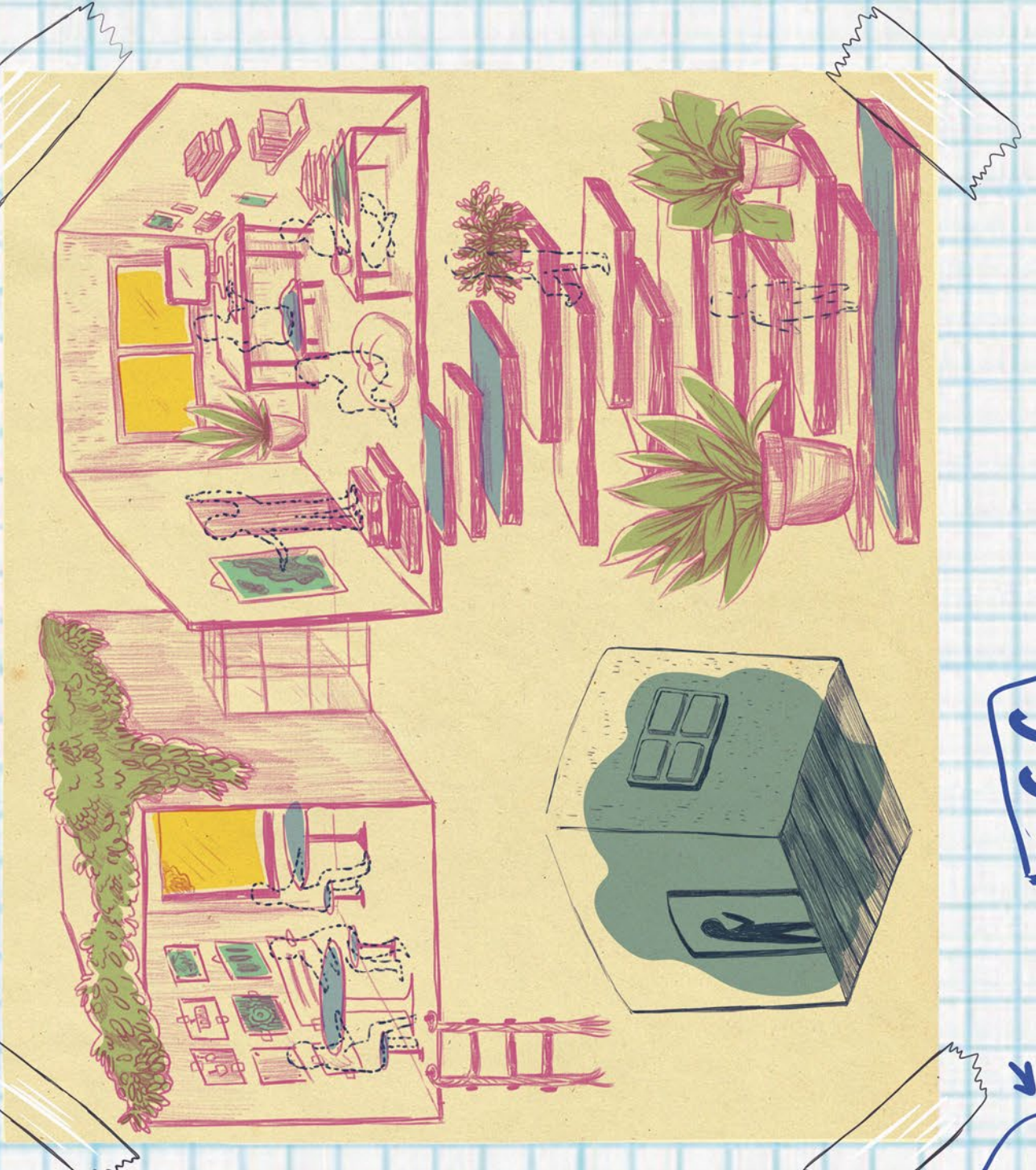
Together

mission

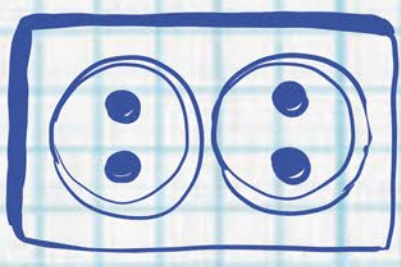
youth

Leap research on youth wellbeing

Spaces



CIC



CCC

Botmar Foundation

Evelina-Maria Grigorean

ArtiViStory Collective

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This visual is a collage that brings together the most common subjects and issues in the interviews. These include: lack of trust, lack of digitalization, lack of transparency between citizens and administration, and lack of spaces for young people. The piece advocates for deliberate action-taking to address the identified issues, in which key stakeholders can act to create conditions that enable well-being and community progress.

- ☐ ImaginingFutures
- ☒ Remembering the Past
- ☐ Sharing Power



OURCLUJ

• SOCIAL INNOVATION CUISINE •

COLLABORATION ROLLS

- MIX SOME ETHICS & OPEN MIND
- ADD PLENTY OF YOUTH VOICE
- LISTEN & COMMUNICATE WELL

• ADD A SPLASH OF "ECO NOT EGO" AND SERVE

HUMAN CAPITAL SALAD

- THROW SOME CULTURE AND TECH IN A BOWL
- PROVIDE SAFE SPACES
- PLENTY OF WELLBEING

• BALANCE CULTURE & TECH TO GENERATE INNOVATION



DIGITALIZATION CAKES

- REMOVE BUREAUCRACY
- ADD SOME TECH
- BUILD TOGETHER
- SERVE WHILE STILL COLD

TRUST SANDWICH

- TAKE SOME SLICES OF PERSEVERENCE
- ADD A HEFTY SPOON OF COMMUNICATION
- PLACE EVERYTHING BETWEEN TWO CLEAR SLICES OF TRANSPARENCY



LONG-TEETH MENU

STARTERS:

- VOICE OF YOUTH
- DIGITALIZATION

MAIN COURSES:

- TRANSPARENCY
- COLLABORATION
- TRUST
- WELLBEING

SIDES:

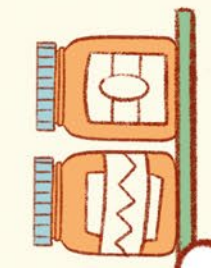
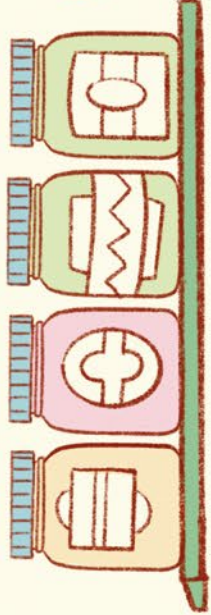
- MOBILITY
- ETHICS
- SAFE SPACES

CHEF'S SPECIALS:

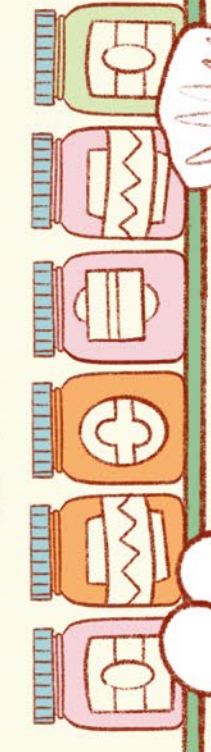
- CULTURE
- TECH
- HUMAN CAPITAL

DESSERTS:

- INNOVATION



SAC COLLAB



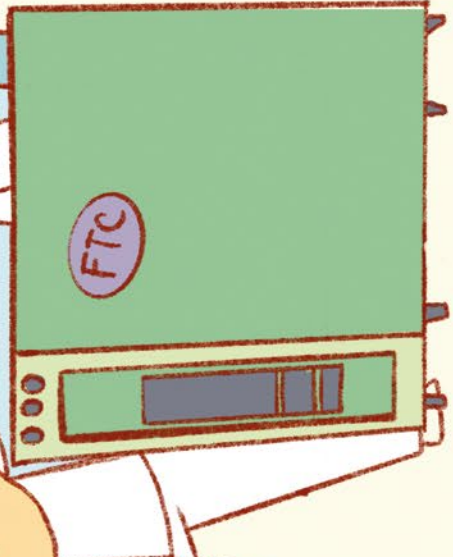
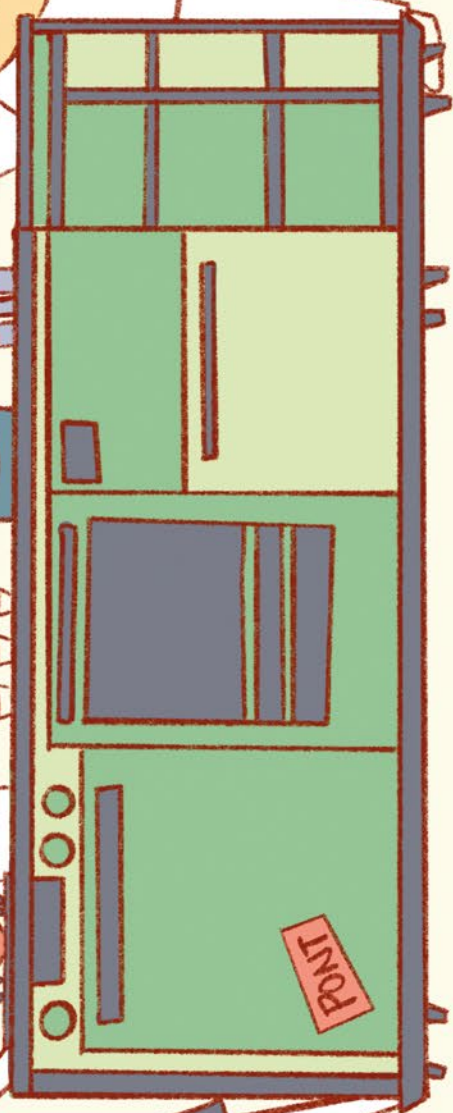
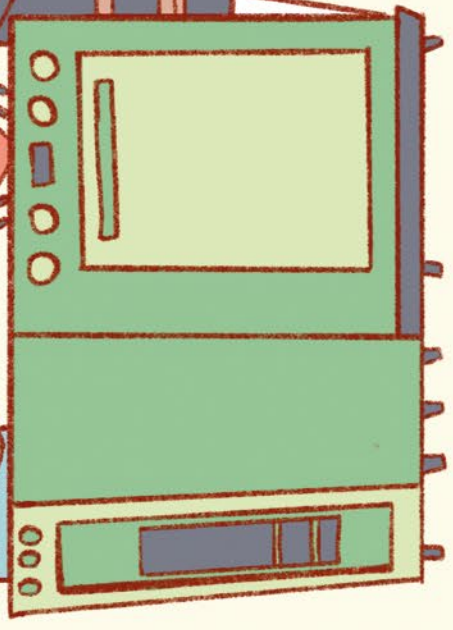
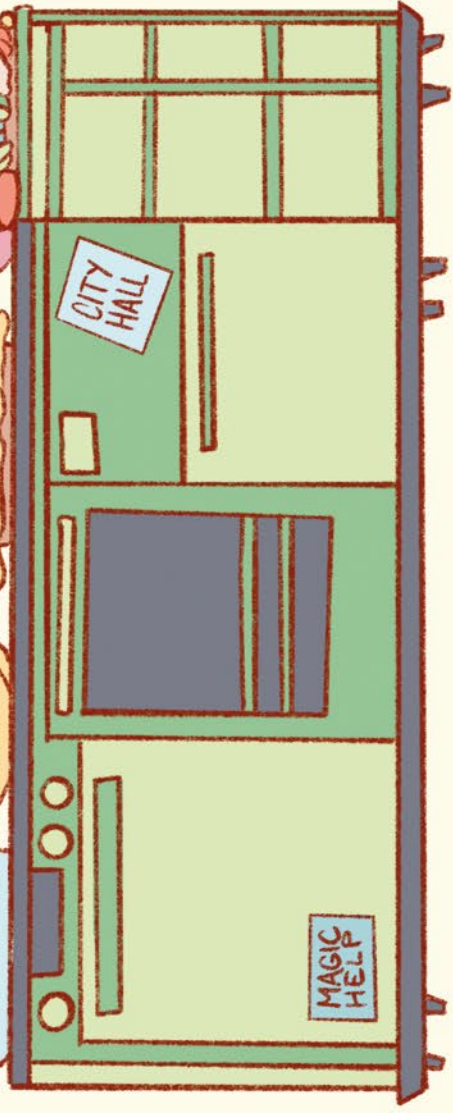
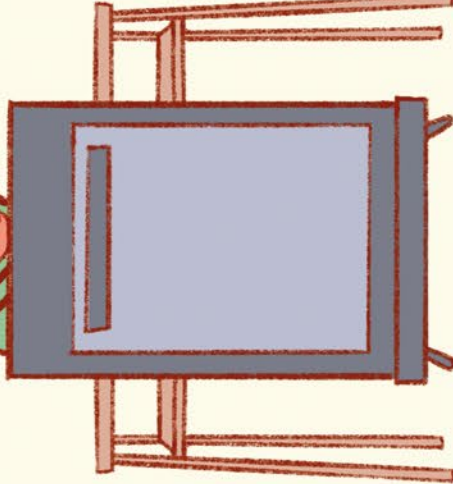
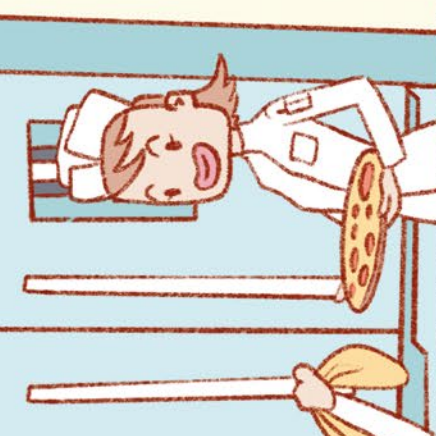
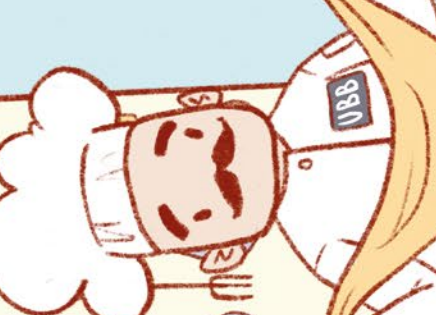
FONDATION BOTNAR



FRESH IDEAS



BRAINSTORMING STATION



Horățiu Coman

ArtiViStory Collective

“

I represent OurCluj as a restaurant. Using visual metaphors to describe some of the study's concepts, I emphasize the “main ingredients” that must come together in order to shape collaboration, human capital, digitalization, and trust. These concepts, presented in the form of food items within a recipe book, stand to be consolidated and brought together by the authorities and the community, entities that need to work together in order to “serve” them to the citizens.

- ☐ ImaginingFutures
- ☐ Remembering the Past
- ☒ **Sharing Power**



Lucian Barbu

ArtiViStory Collective

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This image can be divided into four main registers of reading, from the upper part, to the lower. The topmost part represents the help of the Botnar Foundation in the formation of OurCluj, as well as its contribution to mediating the relationships between the stakeholders and the municipality of Cluj-Napoca. In the center, there lies an image of the municipality itself, that wants to be perceived as a living organism consisting of people, for people, and includes the barriers that other stakeholders still see or feel, thus giving it a sense of ambivalence.

The circle register is a macro representation of Cluj's past, present and future environments: the transition from a past where everyone came together for a common goal for the European Cultural Capital application, to a present where collaboration and co-creation is more often seen between different entities in the city gives hope for a future of continuity and intergenerational empowerment. The world represented in the third register portrays the symbol of each entity that took part in the interviews. Each of their forms are directly taken out of my initial representation of the stakeholders, but unified and made to fit the general mechanisms in which OurCluj functions. The last register shows an underground of living fires, fueling the furnaces of change that motivate the stakeholders to take further action. The fire is symbolic of motivation, inspiration and energy.

- **Imagining Futures**
- Remembering the Past
- Sharing Power



Erdély Bálint

ArtiViStory Collective

“

I tried to subjectively depict the general concept of sharing power through teamwork, with a common goal towards improving the well-being of the youth. The apples and the flowers symbolize the goal of the process, the final product, ready to be harvested. The world is one that's being built step by step with bricks; each brick represents a need that has been satisfied through the collaborative work of OurCluj.

- ☐ ImaginingFutures
- ☐ Remembering the Past
- ☒ **Sharing Power**



Melinda Ureczki Lázár

ArtiViStory Collective

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The image is a figurative, atypical person who inhabits different realms of the imagination. It suggests that individual and collective contemplation is essential for productive and permanent change.

- ☐ ImaginingFutures
- ☒ Remembering the Past
- ☐ Sharing Power



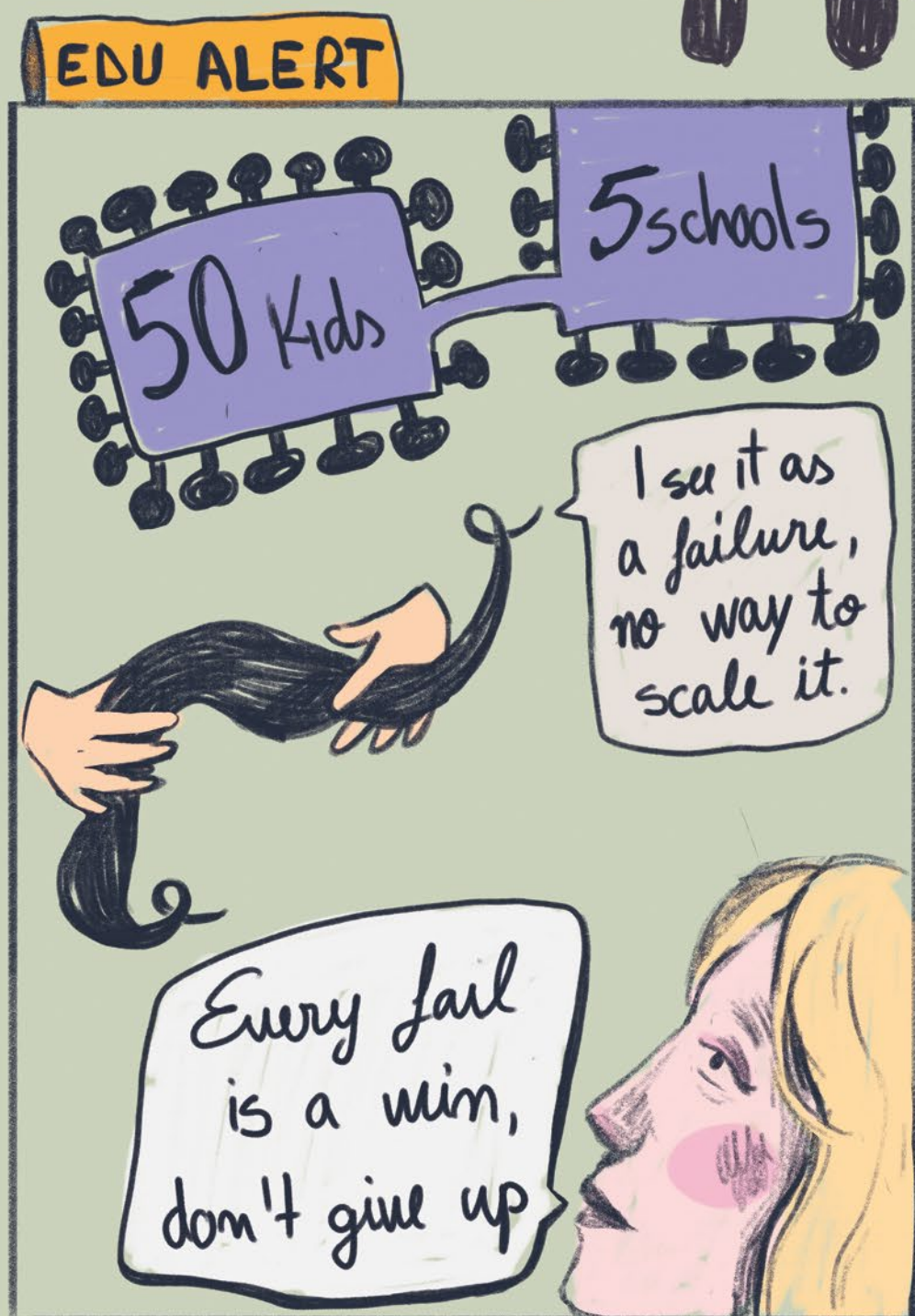
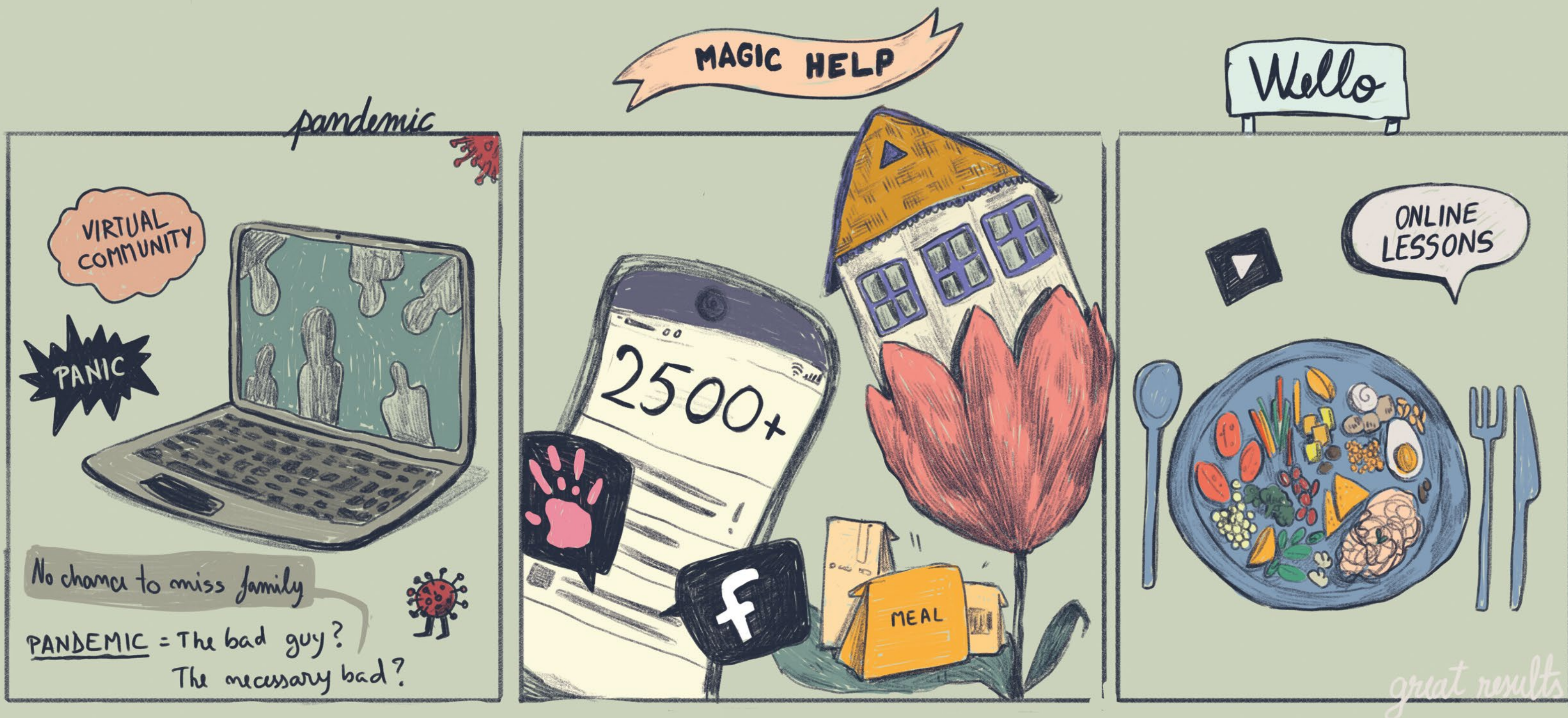
Lucian Barbu

ArtiViStory Collective

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I represented the information from an early planning workshop as a carnival as a means of helping younger or more imaginative people understand its content better. Each direction of action for OurCluj is portrayed as a separate section, in order, from left to right. The first segment of the frieze shows the outcome of raising public awareness and public and private investment in youth issues, obtained through various means. Here, the mental image is translated in a literal way, revealing a ring leader gathering possible customers. The engagement and empowerment of youth in Cluj is represented in the second part of the frieze as a strength test, implying collaboration and taking measurements through research. The third part translates the goal of building a strong social infrastructure using the visual allegory of a cardboard town. The last part, the one on the far right, depicts the future influence of the city strategy on the well-being of youth.

- ☐ ImaginingFutures
- ☐ Remembering the Past
- ☒ **Sharing Power**



Evelina-Maria Grigorean ArtiViStory Collective

“

This piece is a sequential short comic representing the grantees and their project achievements to date. It shows the importance of holding space for everyone, which is critical, especially in the current pandemic where inclusive working environments have allowed collaboration and work at a distance. A distributed sense of ownership in the project facilitated problem-solving internally and the ability to reach our goals. However, a key question, as portrayed in the last frame, remains unanswered and opens up the opportunity for follow-up work and further involvement.

- ☐ ImaginingFutures
- ☐ Remembering the Past
- ☒ **Sharing Power**



LEAP

Melinda Ureczki Lázár

ArtiViStory Collective

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This illustration contains individual narrative images. The image as a whole represents a lack of trust. The individual sections of the image represent the feelings of disappointment that stem from that lack of trust. Disappointment affects the way we function in the world. This image touches on this problem in several ways, but primarily it focuses on the feeling of isolation, which is a state of mind that makes it impossible for people to work and develop together.

- ☐ Imagining Futures
- ☒ Remembering the Past
- ☐ Sharing Power

Lucian Barbu

ArtiViStory Collective

“

This illustration speaks about sharing knowledge and insight, communication between key actors in Cluj, and the benefits of collaboration in decision-making contexts. The work was made after an event commemorating a research study's findings on well-being, where every entity, public or private, that could benefit from the study's results joined in to evaluate and share the knowledge while thinking about ways to integrate it into future practices.

- ☐ ImaginingFutures
- ☐ Remembering the Past
- ☒ **Sharing Power**