



Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Master's Degree Programme

in Economia e Gestione delle Arti e delle attività culturali
(EGArt)

Thesis

Rethinking the organizations: documenta 15 as an example of alternative organization.

Supervisor

Ch. Prof. Monica Calcagno

Co-supervisor

Ch. Prof. Mateo Chacón Pino

Degree Candidate

Aurora Di Iusto

Student ID number 976937

Academic Year

2025 / 2026

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	2
INTRODUCTION.....	3
CHAPTER I.....	6
<i>DOCUMENTA AND RUANGRUPA: AN ART-HISTORIC PERSPECTIVE.</i>	6
1.1 WHAT DOCUMENTA IS: ORIGIN AND HISTORY.....	6
1.2 WHAT RUANGRUPA IS: ORIGIN AND HISTORY.....	19
1.3 THE MEETING POINT: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PLATFORM OF CONTEMPORARY ART.	28
CHAPTER II	41
<i>THE CORE IDEAS OF DOCUMENTA: AN ANALYTICAL SYLLABUS.</i>	41
2.1 CURATORIAL APPROACH.....	41
2.2 VENUES.....	48
2.3 ECONOMY.....	53
2.4 SUSTAINABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY.....	58
CHAPTER III.....	70
<i>DOCUMENTA FIFTEEN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ORGANIZATION STUDIES.</i>	70
3.1. A GENERAL OVERVIEW.	70
3.2 DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP.....	74
3.3 SHARED RESOURCES.....	84
3.4 DECENTRALIZATION.....	90
CONCLUSION.....	100
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	103
APPENDIX A.....	111
<i>GLOSSARY.</i>	111
APPENDIX B.....	117
<i>A CONVERSATION WITH BELLINA ERBY.....</i>	117

Abstract

Title:

Rethinking the organizations: documenta 15 as an example of alternative organization.

This thesis examines the concept of *lumbung* within the context of documenta fifteen, with particular attention to the new models of sustainability promoted by the artistic direction of the ruangrupa collective.

The first chapter provides a dual overview: on the one hand, it analyses the various editions of documenta; on the other, it explores the history and practices of the ruangrupa collective. The focus then shifts to the moment of encounter between these two realities, which marks the outset of the fifteenth edition.

Subsequently, an analytical syllabus is presented, through which the concept of sustainability is explored in relation to various aspects, including the curatorial approach, venues, economy, and accessibility. The practice of *lumbung* guides the most significant experiment of documenta fifteen, giving rise to an alternative economy based on collectivity, the construction of shared resources, and their equitable distribution. Finally, documenta fifteen is analyzed from the perspective of Organization Studies, considering it both as a cultural organization and as an organizational laboratory in which innovative forms of distributed leadership, shared resources, and decentralization are experimented with.

The thesis thus aims to offer a comprehensive reflection on the outcomes of this organizational model, which has challenged traditional institutional paradigms in the art and cultural sectors.

Key words: *lumbung*, documenta, sostenibilità, risorse, Organization Studies.

Introduction

The contemporary landscape, characterized by intense geopolitical tensions and the dominance of hegemonic logics, raises unprecedented and urgent questions regarding the needs of the environment and the community. Art and cultural institutions are often, even today, a reflection of a traditional, top-down, and static world. The decision by documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH to entrust the artistic direction of the fifteenth edition of the Kassel art exhibition, documenta, to the Indonesian collective ruangrupa marks a turning point that brings with it highly interdisciplinary themes concerning community, curatorship, decolonialism, sustainability, and management studies.

The collective presents us with an alternative way of working and organizing. Replacing the traditional figure of the star curator, ruangrupa implements a decentralized, horizontal model based on the commons. It grounds its curatorial approach in overcoming the division between art and life, in collectivity, sharing, and mutual support. It draws on the concept of *lumbung* — the Indonesian word for a collectively governed rice barn¹ — as a practical and ideal framework for the exhibition, designed to facilitate the sharing of resources and ideas.

This transforms documenta into more than just another art exhibition; it becomes a powerful tool, on the one hand, for rethinking institutions and their role, and on the other, for exploring art's potential to challenge and inspire.

In this context, this thesis poses the following research question: How have the distributive and community-based methodologies of the *lumbung*, introduced by ruangrupa, contributed to reorienting exhibition practices toward sustainability, and to what extent does documenta fifteen serve as an example for rethinking organizational structures?

The objective of this research is to present documenta fifteen as an “alternative organization” and to analyze it from the perspective of Organization Studies, highlighting the new models of sustainability promoted by the artistic direction.

¹ ruangrupa, *What is lumbung?*, Asphalt, No. 1, 2021.

In particular, the analysis highlights several key themes related to various significant aspects. A first element is the concept of *lumbung*, which was initially used as an operational model during the preparation of documenta fifteen and then conceptualized and applied within curatorial practice, translating traditional economic concepts regarding the redistribution of resources, sustainability, and collective budget management into concrete management practices. Another central theme is, in fact, a comprehensive analysis of sustainability in its most complex sense — economic, social, ecological, and systemic — which redefines the very concept of “resource” within an exhibition of this caliber. Also central are the inevitable tensions between a traditional, top-down institution and an artistic direction characterized by horizontal and collective decision-making processes.

It would therefore be reductive to analyze documenta fifteen exclusively from a historical-artistic perspective, since it was, to all intents and purposes, a radical experiment in organizational reframing.

To this end, I drew upon archival documents and conducted a qualitative study. The analysis presented in this work benefits significantly from the fundamental contribution of the researchers at the documenta Institut, Mateo Chacón Pino and Maria Neumann. Their contribution is particularly evident in the historical-artistic reconstruction of the exhibition and the ruangrupa collective. I also considered it essential to obtain an insider’s perspective on what documenta fifteen was. For this purpose, I conducted an online interview with Bellina Erby, who was able to share her perspective as a member of the Gudskul ecosystem and a former Assistant Artistic Director for documenta fifteen².

It is important to note that many terms are intentionally written in lowercase out of respect for, and in alignment with, ruangrupa’s ethos, as well as that of documenta.

This thesis is structured in three parts. The first chapter offers a twofold overview: on the one hand, it examines documenta across its various editions; on the other, it examines the ruangrupa collective, before focusing on the moment when these two realities converged, marking the launch of the fifteenth edition. The second part presents an analytical syllabus through which the key concepts of the organizational model implemented by ruangrupa are explored. First and foremost, the curatorial approach — intrinsically

² Appendix B. *A conversation with Bellina Erby.*

connected to the collective's identity and way of being — prioritizes collective input and process over the final product. Second, the venues, conceived as sites for gathering and for observing the surrounding reality. The establishment of space constitutes a significant element of ruangrupa's manifesto. In addition, the economic system — based on the concept of *lumbung* — gives shape to an alternative economy founded on collectivity, the creation of shared resources, and their equitable distribution. Finally, sustainability and accessibility, highlighting the measures and solutions that ruangrupa has managed to implement to make this edition of documenta less harmful to the environment while also ensuring it is economically and socially equitable³. This syllabus establishes the foundation for a more strictly managerial analysis to be pursued in the next chapter. Therefore, in the third chapter, documenta fifteen is analyzed through the lens of Organization Studies, examining it as a cultural organization and interpreting it as an organizational laboratory. Specifically, it explores the principles of alternative organizational studies: the deconstruction of command through distributed leadership, solidarity-based economic management rooted in shared resources, and the dissolution of spatial and decision-making hierarchies through decentralization. These paradigms challenge traditional institutional models in the world of art and culture and thus serve as an ideal case study for rethinking organizations.

³ documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, Hatje Cantz, Kassel, 2022, p. 267.

Chapter I

documenta and ruangrupa: an art-historic perspective.

1.1 What documenta is: origin and history.

documenta originated from the intellectual and artistic vision of Arnold Bode, who was active as a painter, draughtsman, designer, professor, and co-founder of the Kassel Art Academy in 1948. Born in Kassel in 1900 and passing away there in 1977, Bode played a central role in shaping the city's post-war cultural identity. For him, the 1955 Federal Garden Show in Kassel, which saw the bomb-scarred mounds of the Second World War replanted with rose beds, constituted the ideal opportunity to realize his aspiration for a significant international exhibition of modern art in Germany. Central to this ambition was the reintegration of the avant-garde, which had been censured and persecuted under National Socialism, into the German cultural sphere and to an audience affected by years of cultural deprivation. This represented the first major exhibition of modern art following the notorious Degenerate Art Exhibition held in Munich in 1937⁴. After a decade of Nazism and a further ten years of post-war reconstruction, the city of Kassel witnessed a cultural resurgence. The Museum Fridericianum was chosen as the venue for the exhibition. Conceived in the spirit of the Enlightenment, it opened in 1779 to provide public access to the collections of the Landgraves of Hesse. During the Second World War, it was subjected to bombing and fire by Allied air forces in 1943-1944, resulting in the loss of large parts of its art collections, library, and invaluable archive, and leaving the structure itself in ruins. The building was partially restored in the postwar period, with the aim of using it exclusively for exhibitions⁵. It thus came to represent an almost perfect ideal representation of the German educational catastrophe that Bode sought to redress through documenta. While preserving the building's historic façade, he reconfigured the interior of the Fridericianum as a modernist gallery, creating a flexible exhibition space. In developing the exhibition's content, Bode was assisted by a working committee headed

⁴ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta*, documenta.de, n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta> [Last access: March 27, 2026]

⁵ documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, Hatje Cantz, Kassel, 2022, p. 241.

by the notable art historian Werner Haftmann, who had recently published *"Painting in the Twentieth Century,"* a work that effectively guided the curatorial vision, influencing both the selection of artworks and the narrative structure⁶.

The theme of the early years of documenta has been examined on numerous occasions; however, it appears to take an interesting turn only in recent years. Noteworthy is the research conducted for the exhibition *"documenta. Politics and Art"* held at the Deutsches Historisches Museum in 2021. Notable contributions to this discourse are provided by the art historians Julia Voss and Julia Friedrich, as well as by the historian Dorothee Wierling, in the catalog. It emerges that, thanks to parallel research on the German occupation in northern Italy conducted by the historian Carlo Gentile, the name of Werner Haftmann appears among the war criminals sought by the Italian authorities. He held official membership in the SA and NSDAP (Nazi Party) and, in the summer of 1944, was appointed to lead a unit charged with combating partisans in central and northern Italy. Undoubtedly, the art historian's silence regarding this period of his life had significant implications not only for his methodological approach to art history and his reconstruction of modernism but also for the development of documenta and the politics of memory⁷. A close analysis of the first documenta reveals that, although the principal currents of the avant-garde — such as Expressionism, Futurism, Constructivism, and Cubism — were represented, there was a conspicuous omission of explicitly political and subversive currents such as Dadaism. As an art movement that emerged simultaneously in Switzerland and the United States, and subsequently developed in Germany and Paris, Dadaism exerted a significant influence on the international art scene as a whole⁸. Works

⁶ Gross R., Bang Larsen L., Blume D., Pooth A., Voss J. (eds.), *documenta: Politics and Art*, Prestel, Munich, 2021, p.42.

⁷ Gross R., Bang Larsen L., Blume D., Pooth A., Voss J. (eds.), cit., p.13.

⁸ Referring to the words of the critic and art historian Giulio Carlo Argan (1909-1992), Dadaist thought is "the first announcement of that 'global contestation' which, after the second war, will manifest itself everywhere, and with far greater force and breadth, as a will to remove all rational 'censorships' and to free society from the superstructures of authority and power, that is, of institutionalized values. [...] Dadaism proposes itself as an action of disturbance whose aim is to put the system into crisis, turning against society its own procedures [...]".

Giulio Carlo Argan, *L'Arte Moderna 1770-1970*, Sansoni, 2002, p. 182.

such as those by members of the Berlin Dada group, John Heartfield, and George Grosz, thus constituted a significant absence within the exhibition. Another example that emerges from Julia Voss's reconstruction is the case of the Jewish painter Rudolf Levy, whose name appeared on a draft list of artists for documenta but was subsequently omitted. This highlights Haftmann's incomplete reconstruction of modernism, carried out without recognizing the contributions of artists who were murdered by the German Wehrmacht as Jews or Bolsheviks. However, Haftmann was not the only one; the careers of several early founders of documenta were deeply involved with the oppressive Nazi regime. Likewise, by analyzing the exhibition design conceived by Bode, the mechanisms through which German guilt was made to disappear in the ruins of the Fridericianum become apparent. Consequently, this shaped the foundation of documenta, leading not to an accurate reconstruction of modernism but a political instrumentalization of memory. Echoing Dr. Maria Neumann's reflection, an exclusive focus on former NSDAP members risks attributing responsibility during National Socialism solely to party affiliation. To broaden the perspective on historical connections, Neumann emphasizes the importance of analyzing figures such as Adolf Arndt and August-Martin Euler, who operated behind the scenes but were nonetheless foundational figures and essential to the realization of documenta. Both jurists, they were not active at the party level during the National Socialist period but maintained diverse contacts: Arndt acted as a defense lawyer for persecuted individuals until he was himself forced into labor due to his Jewish origins, while Euler supported the regime as a jurist at IG Farben, thereby contributing to the use of forced labor and the exploitation of concentration camp prisoners. Their political careers, which diverged in political and ideological terms, began only after the war. Arndt joined the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), whereas Euler became a member and co-founder of the Liberal Democratic Party of Hesse (later FDP), which became a reference point for conservative right-wing circles and former NSDAP members. Both entered the first Bundestag in 1949 and served for several legislative terms, becoming prominent figures in the Federal Republic. Thanks to their close connections with institutions and political figures, "Bode and Haftmann depended on networkers like them"⁹, united by an interest in art and, more importantly, by the shared objective of

⁹ Neumann M., *In zweifelhafter Gesellschaft? Adolf Arndt und August-Martin Euler – Zwei vergangenheitspolitische Akteure der ersten documenta 1955*, ZFG 72, 2024, p. 140.

restoring the pre-war state, rediscovering banned art, and rebuilding the city. This resulted in the rehabilitation of an art — both that which had previously been labeled “degenerate” and abstract art — that was not in line with National Socialism, as well as in exhibitions that, while commemorating persecuted artists, overlooked those who were direct victims of the regime’s crimes¹⁰. The figures cited thus confirm that from its inception, documenta was not merely an art exhibition but also a political project, and they illustrate why reconstructing its history solely from an artistic perspective is insufficient, as its realization was shaped not only by art historians or curators but also by politicians. Moreover, the first ten editions provide an important lens through which to examine the role of the fine arts during the Cold War. From the beginning, part of its funding originated from the government department responsible for anti-communist activities. The Federal Ministry for All-German Affairs consented to support the exhibition primarily due to Kassel’s proximity to the inner-German border, in light of its expected influence on the Soviet occupation zone¹¹. It is therefore impossible to comprehend documenta and the considerable importance it came to assume without considering the amalgamation of politics and art and the resulting degree of contamination of an apparently apolitical institution. It is asserted that documenta — like other major perennial exhibitions — owes its rise and its position as Germany’s most successful art exhibition precisely to its political dimension¹². Significantly, the inaugural edition achieved an overwhelming public success with 130,000 visitors in 100 days¹³.

A chronological study of the various editions offers valuable insight into the evolution of documenta, providing a deeper understanding of its historical trajectory as well as the surprising caesuras that have punctuated its development.

The first documenta (July 16 – September 18, 1955) provided an overview of a genealogy of the present, generated from a mood shaped by post-war trauma and the will to

¹⁰ Neumann M., cit.

¹¹ Gross R., Bang Larsen L., Blume D., Pooth A., Voss J. (eds.), cit., p. 14.

¹² Ivi, p. 12.

¹³ Universes in Universes, *documenta – History, All editions of the documenta in Kassel since its beginning in 1955*, universes.art, n.d., <https://universes.art/en/documenta/history> [Last access: March 27, 2026]

modernize¹⁴. Bode personally designed the installation, with the unplastered, whitewashed walls offering an impressive backdrop for the artworks. The exhibition opened with a photographic series in the entrance area displaying examples of ancient, early Christian, and non-European art as the foundation of European modernism. This was complemented by photographic portraits of the masters of the avant-garde and an exhibition of architectural photography dating from 1905 to 1955, held on the second floor of the rotunda of the Fridericianum. The artists exhibited included Alexander Calder — the only non-European artist and the sole participant born in the United States — alongside Hans Arp, Pablo Picasso, Giorgio de Chirico, Wassily Kandinsky, and Fritz Winter, who is considered the father of abstract painting in Germany. Despite the event's international ambitions, the selection ultimately focused almost entirely on the European continent. In total, 670 works by 148 artists from six nations were showcased, predominantly from Germany, France, and Italy¹⁵.

documenta 2 (July 11 – October 11, 1959), for instance, showcased several figurative tendencies, notably in the paintings by Francis Bacon and others. Realist tendencies were largely excluded, a decision that, in the context of the Cold War, constituted a clear political statement. Abstract art was elevated to the status of a universal language, and documenta predominantly focused on it, heavily involving American artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Jackson Pollock under the motto “Art has become abstract”¹⁶. With 1,770 works by 325 artists (including eleven women) and 134,000 visitors, documenta 2 attracted both enthusiastic support and strong criticism for abstract art¹⁷.

With the founding of a supporting company, documenta GmbH, the exhibition became institutionalized and was henceforth intended to take place every four years.

¹⁴ Floyd K. M., *d is for documenta: institutional identity for a periodic exhibition*, OnCurating, Issue 33, n.d., <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-33-reader/d-is-for-documenta-institutional-identity-for-a-periodic-exhibition.html> [Last access: March 27, 2026]

¹⁵ documenta, *catalog*, Prestel-Verlag, Munich, 1995.

¹⁶ documenta II, *catalog*, M. Du Mont Schauberg, Cologne, 1959.

¹⁷ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta II*, documenta.de, n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/ii-documenta> [Last access: March 27, 2026]

documenta 3 (June 28 – October 6, 1964) was, however, delayed by internal disagreements¹⁸, opening five years after the previous edition — a rhythm that would become standard. By this time, Pop Art was gaining prominence in the United States, Nouveau Realism had established itself in France, and a new avant-garde, including Fluxus, was emerging in Germany, alongside the rise of happenings, conceptual art, and process-based practices. Nevertheless, rather than directly engaging with these innovative tendencies, the exhibition primarily focused on the traditional artistic genres, presenting individual artistic personalities, notably marking the first participation of the German artist Joseph Beuys. The 200,000 visitors exemplified the segment of West German society that had definitively aligned with the Western cultural and social sphere¹⁹. “The youngest documenta ever,”²⁰ namely the fourth edition (June 27 – October 6, 1968), brought Kassel closer to the cultural and political pulse of the times. It was the last one directed by Arnold Bode, and for the first time, without the support of Werner Haftmann. A group of twenty-six individuals began selecting artists through a democratic process, shifting away from the historically distanced and implicitly authoritative modes of art-historical judgment toward an approach consistently committed to the present. The focus was placed firmly on recent artistic production, and numerous works were created shortly before or expressly for the exhibition. Considerable space was dedicated to Pop Art, Minimal Art, and Op Art. With 51 artists, work from the United States constituted around a third of the entire exhibition, earning it the title “documenta americana”²¹. In the context

¹⁸ Internal controversy within the documenta committee centered on the question of whether future editions of the exhibition should give greater prominence to contemporary artists. In 1968, the disagreements led to the resignation of Werner Haftmann and several other committee members.

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta III*, documenta.de, n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta-3> [Last access: March 27, 2026]

¹⁹ Gross R., Bang Larsen L., Blume D., Pooth A., Voss J. (eds.), cit.

²⁰ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta 4*, documenta.de, n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/4-documenta> [Last access: March 27, 2026]

²¹ Contacts between the early organizers of *documenta* and the first director of the Museum of Modern Art, Alfred H. Barr Jr., were never concealed. These connections intensified during the preparations for the MoMA exhibition *German Art of the 20th Century* (1957). A group of experts affiliated with *documenta* ensured that the works selected for the exhibition emphasized early twentieth-century modernism—particularly German Expressionism—rather than postwar German art. Barr, in turn, included Werner Haftmann in the planning of the New York exhibition. As a result, Haftmann exerted considerable influence

of 1968's global political unrest, marked by student movements and anti-Vietnam protests, this dominance provoked significant criticism. Although the demonstrations in Kassel remained moderate compared with those at that year's Venice Biennale²², students interrupted the opening with red flags, and a press conference was transformed into a happening by a group of artists led by the Germans Wolf Vostell and Jörg Immendorff. Among other concerns, the activists denounced the absence of Fluxus, Happening, and Performance art from the official program, as well as the restricted representation of the German art scene, in contrast to the far more complete presentation of American art²³. All these displays of consensus among the Western allies ultimately generated a counterreaction. In 1972, the Swiss curator Harald Szeemann, acting as the sole artistic director, marked the end of the Bode era and a decisive turning point in the history of documenta up to that date. He not only personified a new model of exhibition organizer; for documenta 5 (June 30 – October 8, 1972), Szeemann designed an exhibition grounded in an expanded conception of art, presenting a multiplicity of "pictorial worlds"²⁴ from recent years, ranging from kitsch to comics and Socialist Realism. This rupture with convention inaugurated a new era in Kassel. Quasi antithetical to the earlier documenta exhibitions, which were largely committed to abstraction, "reality" now emerged, for

not only on the conceptual framework of *documenta*, but also on that of the MoMA exhibition. By the time of *documenta 4*, MoMA was only one of several New York-based lending institutions, alongside the Guggenheim Museum, the Jewish Museum, and the Whitney Museum of American Art. The logistical arrangements required for this extensive body of American loans—comprising large-scale works of Pop Art, Color Field painting, Post-Painterly Abstraction, Op Art, and Minimal Art—were sufficiently elaborate to warrant the establishment of a dedicated office in New York.

Gross R., Bang Larsen L., Blume D., Pooth A., Voss J. (eds.), cit., pp. 119-123.

²² The 1968 wave of protest also reached the artistic field, profoundly affecting the Venice Biennale. Exhibitors challenged the institution's so-called *fascist statute*, considered obsolete and incompatible with new artistic demands, rejecting awards and commercial mechanisms and calling for a redefinition of the Biennale as a space of experimentation and collective research. Despite a heavy police presence, protests spread across Venice, culminating in clashes in St. Mark's Square, the withdrawal of numerous artists, and the closure or emptying of many pavilions, with the few works on display turned away.

La contestazione della Biennale di Venezia, Infoaut, June 18, 1968, <https://www.infoaut.org/storia-di-classe/18-giugno-1968-la-contestazione-della-biennale-di-venezia> [Last access: March 27, 2026]

²³ *Universes in Universes, documenta – History, All editions of the documenta in Kassel since its beginning in 1955*, cit.

²⁴ Venturi L., *documenta 5. Colloquio con Szeeman*, 1972.

instance, in photorealistic paintings and in lifelike sculptures²⁵. Concept Art and Happening also shaped the exhibition with many works performatively activated over the entire 100 days, including Joseph Beuys with his *Büro für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* and Vito Acconci's performance space in the Fridericianum (Figure 1). Furthermore, the public was afforded new opportunities for participation and critical engagement, which nearly 230,000 attendees actively embraced²⁶.



Figure 1. Vito Acconci, *Cross-Fronts* (1972)

Source: documenta und Museum

Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective*.

documenta 5, documenta.de, n.d.,

<https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta-5>

Curated by Manfred Schneckenburger, *documenta 6* (June 24 – October 2, 1977) reflected the prevailing spirit of international détente. For the first time, works by artists from East Germany were included, receiving a largely favorable reception. New media such as film, photography, and video were represented and legitimized as art. Although the year was marked by the terrorist violence of the so-called German Autumn, this edition achieved considerable success, consolidating its status as both an international art event and an institution in the Federal Republic of Germany²⁷.

By contrast, *documenta 7* (June 10 – September 28, 1982) marked a significant turning point. The artistic director Rudi Fuchs realized a sort of “dialectical countermovement”, emphasizing the aesthetic autonomy of contemporary art rather than treating it predominantly as a medium for social or political activism, as his predecessors had. This was achieved through a process of de-ideologization and depoliticization of the art debate,

²⁵ Gardner A., Green C., *Biennials, triennials, and documenta: the exhibitions that created contemporary art*, John Wiley & Sons, 2016, p.20.

²⁶ Gross R., Bang Larsen L., Blume D., Pooth A., Voss J. (eds.), cit., p. 25.

²⁷ Ivi, pp. 26 – 27.

emphasizing the aesthetic autonomy of art²⁸. This curatorial intention was reflected in the choice of media: primarily large-format paintings and sculptures. Conceptual and performative art was also on display, albeit in a significantly reduced presence, with only a single video installation being shown²⁹. Nonetheless, artists such as Joseph Beuys, together with his *7000 Oaks* for Kassel, remained included. This turnaround must be situated within a broader historical framework in which the institutional consolidation largely replaced the revolutionary action, the museum regained its institutional authority, and a successful international art market emerged, with a gallery system eager to commercialize works of art³⁰.

Manfred Schneckenburger also assumed the artistic direction of the subsequent edition. As in the previous exhibition, he refrained from articulating a theoretical framework; nevertheless, documenta 8 (June 20 – September 20, 1987) once again foregrounded the socio-political responsibility of art. Rather than emphasizing aesthetic autonomy, many of the exhibited works presented art as a functional medium, this time framing the question of the political quality of art in terms of postmodernism. Schneckenburger proclaimed “the loss of utopia in advanced capitalism and at the same time emphasized the dissolution of a hierarchical canon of styles and forms in art.”³¹ Consequently, painting played a significantly diminished role compared to five years previously, whereas sculptures, installations, videos, and performances assumed a central position.

Despite the major geopolitical shifts of the early 1990s following the end of the Cold War — including the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Yugoslav wars, and German reunification — documenta 9 (June 13 – September 20, 1992) came to be regarded as one of the most apolitical, yet also one of the most popular editions. Artistic director Jan Hoet outlined programmatic approaches that were easily accessible to visitors unfamiliar with art. The curatorial project aimed to foreground people and their sensual, perceptive, and vulnerable physicality, which was increasingly displaced by a digitalized and virtualized world³².

²⁸ Gross R., Bang Larsen L., Blume D., Pooth A., Voss J. (eds.), cit., pp. 27 – 28.

²⁹ Reference is made to the following work: *PM Magazine/Acid Rock* (1982) by US artist Dara Birnbaum.

³⁰ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta 7*, documenta.de, n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta-7> [Last access: March 27, 2026]

³¹ documenta 8, *Catalog*, Weber & Weidemeyer GmbH & Co KG, Kassel, 1987.

³² documenta IX, *catalog*, vol. 1, Edition Cantz, Stuttgart, 1992.

The last documenta of the 20th century marked a decisive rupture. For the first time, it was directed by a woman, Catherine David, whose curatorial approach confronted a wide range of political, social, and cultural discourses. documenta 10 (June 21 – September 28, 1997) sought to provide new frameworks for understanding the state of the world, opening the exhibition to a globalized context in which the traditional hierarchy of center and periphery was no longer valid. Within this context, debates on post-colonialism³³ were brought into focus, alongside reflections on urban models, the role of the image in media society, and the emerging field of net art. An exemplifying work was Lois Weinberger's *Das über die Pflanzen/ist eins mit Ihnen* (1990-97). Installed in the gravel bed of the decommissioned Track 1 at Kassel's main railway station, the work combined native vegetation with neophytes. The rapidly growing plants from southern and southeastern Europe gradually spread and displaced the original flora. Weinberger interpreted this ongoing botanical process as a metaphor for social dynamics, transforming global migration into the central theme of an ecological work of art³⁴. To situate documenta at the end of the century, David had also conceived a series of "retroperspectives". These projects simultaneously highlighted tendencies in postwar art and made visible significant tendencies in the omission of Western art historiography. The inclusion of artists such as Lygia Clark, for example, brought renewed attention to Brazilian modernism and challenged Eurocentric narratives. In addition, a film program and the series "100 Days – 100 Guests" framed the broader cultural agenda of the exhibition. Despite its ambition, documenta 10 was widely criticized, especially by those who feared for the autonomy of art, for its pronounced intellectualism and absence of sensuality, which clearly broke with the curatorial approach and the exhibition's relationship with its audiences that had characterized the previous documenta 9³⁵.

³³ The transition to the postcolonial age appeared to have run its full course when, in July, the United Kingdom formally transferred sovereignty over the former Crown Colony of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China.

Gross R., Bang Larsen L., Blume D., Pooth A., Voss J. (eds.), cit., p. 31.

³⁴ Catherine David, *documenta X – 1997*, loisweinberg.net, n.d., <https://www.loisweinberger.net/en/exhibitions/documenta-x-2/> [Last access: March 27, 2026]

³⁵ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta X*, documenta.de, n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta-x> [Last access: March 27, 2026]

Furthermore, the shift in perspective that Catherine David had anticipated seemed to be accomplished in documenta 11 (June 8 – September 15, 2002). The first documenta of the new millennium was regarded as the first truly global and postcolonial edition, and, for the first time, it was directed by a non-European, the Nigerian-born Okwui Enwezor. Conceived as a multi-platform project, the exhibition was structured around five “platforms” aimed at examining the contemporary role of culture and its intersections with the global system of knowledge. Within this framework, the Kassel exhibition functioned as the fifth and final platform. Before the exhibition’s opening, four transdisciplinary platforms were held across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean, addressing issues such as democracy and urban crisis. Many of the artworks presented in Kassel engaged directly with these themes, often employing documentary approaches³⁶. Craigie Horsfield’s installation, *El Hierro Conversation* (2002), for instance, clearly exemplifies the key principle of this edition, as articulated by Enwezor — namely, that “art is the production of knowledge”. This was achieved by focusing on global issues such as migration, memory, and social transformation³⁷.

Five years later, the 2007 edition was led by two curators: Artistic Director Roger M. Buergel and curator Ruth Noack. This marked the first instance of dual curatorial leadership in the exhibition’s history³⁸, replacing the traditional single-curator model with a collaborative one. The conceptual framework of documenta 12 (June 16 – September 23, 2007) was articulated around the idea that visual culture is structured by a limited number of recurring forms that migrate throughout art history in different contexts and meanings. The curators challenged the conventional concept of the “contemporary”, understanding it not in terms of chronological proximity but in relation to the present relevance of artworks. Through the juxtaposition of works from different periods and cultural backgrounds, the exhibition aimed to reveal unexpected contemporaneities and to trace the migration of aesthetic form across temporal and cultural boundaries. The exhibition ranged from fourteenth-century Persian miniatures

³⁶ Universes in Universes, *documenta 11*, universes.art, n.d., 2002, <https://universes.art/en/documenta/2002> [Last access: March 27, 2026]

³⁷ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta 11*, documenta.de, n.d., https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_11 [Last access: March 27, 2026]

³⁸ However, since documenta’s statutes do not formally allow for two directors, the arrangement remained unofficial.

to global artistic practices of recent decades and featured the highest proportion of women artists in documenta's history to date, at approximately 50 percent³⁹.

Following the platform model of documenta 11, the thirteenth edition expanded this approach by not only organizing events outside Kassel in the preparatory phase, but also, for the first time, integrating these sites into the exhibition itself during its official duration. The exhibition extended across numerous locations in Kassel, including both traditional institutions, such as the Fridericianum, and museums with their own collections, such as the Brothers Grimm Museum. Beyond Kassel, documenta 13 also included the former Benedictine monastery of Breitenau — which had housed a labor and concentration camp under the National Socialists and later functioned as a girls' educational home and a psychiatric institution — as well as a parallel exhibition in Kabul, Afghanistan, Cairo and Alexandria, Egypt, and Banff, Canada. documenta 13 (June 9 – September 16, 2012) was directed for the second time by a woman, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, whose curatorial concept revolved around a motif closely connected to the founding idea of documenta: the healing of war trauma through art. This framework linked the exhibition's venues and artistic productions by connecting historical destruction with artistic responses and processes of recovery. Anti-anthropocentrism emerged as a key theme, reflecting the exhibition's exploration of the relationships between art, knowledge, trauma, and ecology. Overall, the exhibition marked a shift toward a more conceptual, hybrid, and interdisciplinary understanding of contemporary art, engaging science, philosophy, ecology, and politics. An approach that is possible to exemplify by *Brain*, a central curatorial assemblage that functioned as the epistemological core of the exhibition⁴⁰.

The need to rethink the Eurocentric perspective of the major international exhibitions remained central to the curatorial vision of Artistic Director Adam Szymczyk. documenta 14 (April 8 – September 17, 2017) embraced the principles of decentralization and the decolonization of the Northwestern canon under the motto "Learning from Athens", proposing two locations: Kassel and Athens. The selection of Athens as the antipode of Kassel — conceived as its double — responded to the ideas that the world could no longer be interpreted and narrated from a single place, presenting the Greek capital as a symbol

³⁹ documenta 12, *Catalog*, Taschen, Cologne, 2007.

⁴⁰ dOCUMENTA (13), *The Book of Books*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2012.

of contemporary global crises and humanitarian catastrophes. The choice, however, proved to be contradictory, as it highlighted Germany's austerity policies toward Greece and gave rise to accusations of neo-colonial behavior, crisis tourism, and insufficient involvement of the local scene⁴¹. The exhibition featured over 160 international artists exhibiting in both locations, presenting primarily newly commissioned works. It was complemented by historical works, including, for example, a sixteenth-century book art, and contemporary works by indigenous artists from diverse backgrounds, such as masks by the Kwakw'ala artist Beau Dick. In keeping with the objective of "unlearning", the exhibition thus sought to challenge the entrenched aesthetic hierarchies. While the exhibition was met with largely polemical press responses, accusing it of excessive instrumentalization of art, it nonetheless attracted over one million visitors. Its decentralized structure questioned the traditional model of the exhibition as a unified event in time and space, raising questions about the future and sustainability of documenta as a global exhibition⁴².

It is within these historical roots that the curatorial ideas of the collective ruangrupa are situated in the realization of documenta 15 (June 18 – September 25, 2022), through the presentation of a curatorial approach aimed at creating a "different, collaborative model of resource use-economically, but also in terms of ideas, knowledge, programs and innovation."⁴³

⁴¹ Smith H., "Crapumenta!" ... Anger in Athens as the blue lambs of Documenta hit town", The Guardian, May 14, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/may/14/documenta-14-athens-german-art-extravaganza> [Last access: March 27, 2026]

⁴² documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta 14*, documenta.de, n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta-14> [Last access: March 27, 2026]

⁴³ Universes in Universes, *lumbung. Short concept by ruangrupa for documenta 15*, universes.art, n.d., <https://universes.art/en/documenta/2022/short-concept> [Last access: March 27, 2026]

1.2 What ruangrupa is: origin and history.

The ruangrupa collective emerged from friendship among students at art schools in Jakarta and Yogyakarta during the mid-1990s.

Regarding the name ruangrupa, it literally signifies “visual space”, combining the words *ruang*, meaning space, and *rupa*, meaning visual art. Space, in fact, was one of the main reasons for the establishment of the group. The collective began through discussions and brainstorming sessions, mostly held in friends’ living rooms. It was only in 2000, following several projects and efforts, that they were able to rent a small house and convert it into a formal space for gathering and collaborative work.

“Conversations have always been central in this process, and domestic spaces have been continuously altered to become more public.”⁴⁴

It is necessary to situate ruangrupa within its historical context, as the collective strengthened its presence during a significant turning point in Indonesian history, assuming a crucial role — alongside others — in the revitalization of contemporary art.

In general, the contemporary art community in Indonesia has been shaped by various cultural, historical, and socio-political factors.

The period of Sukarno's governance (1945-1967), the first presidency following Indonesia's independence in 1945, was marked by significant artistic flourishing. Within his political system — characterized by the coexistence of nationalist, religious, and communist forces⁴⁵ — artists became engaged in a variety of activities within formal organizations and began to curate exhibitions. The formation of artist groups or collectives became particularly prominent during this period, driven by at least four primary motivations: the need for shared space to produce artworks, the formation of affiliations based on shared interests or specific socio-cultural backgrounds, collaboration

⁴⁴ ruangrupa, *What is lumbung?*, Asphalt, No. 1, 2021.

⁴⁵ Treccani, *Suharto*, Enciclopedia online, 2011, <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/suharto/>
[Last access: April 14, 2026]

in exhibitions or activities that support the arts, and the articulation of a collective position to secure broader recognition; often involving a combination of these factors⁴⁶.

Reference should be made to PERSAGI (Persatuan Ahli Gambar Indonesia or the Association of Indonesian Painters, founded in 1937 in Jakarta) and LEKRA (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, or People's Cultural Institute).

The first group emerged during the Dutch colonial era, when Western artistic paradigms exerted considerable influence over local artistic practices. Despite the predominance of European art — which led to the neglect of Indonesia's cultural heritage — they initiated a revival and renewed appreciation for folk art, emphasizing the country's historical narratives. S. Sudjono, known as the father of Indonesian modernism, formalized the concept of *sanggar* (creative communities), defined as places where artists could gather and work together. This initiative established the conditions for a sustained balance between communal and personal dimensions, which became deeply ingrained in Indonesian culture and marked a significant starting point for subsequent developments in response to the evolving needs of contemporary artists⁴⁷. As regards LEKRA, it was founded in 1950 as the cultural branch of the Indonesian Communist Party, with the endorsement of President Sukarno. This relationship was marked by a shared commitment to advancing the interests of Indonesia's poor and working-class populations. Reducing their work simply to "art in uniform"⁴⁸ is misleading. The group, in fact, emphasized art as a form of enjoyment and expression accessible to all, while also promoting it as a medium for conveying the aspirations of the people and portraying the working class, thereby introducing dynamism, variety, and complexity in multiple ways. Moreover, members were encouraged to produce works in the style of socialist realism, considered the most appropriate approach based on Soviet and Chinese models, and capable of being adapted to the local Indonesian context. Socialist realism was thus conceived not merely as an artistic style but as an ideological tool, while still allowing room for artistic innovation and experimentation⁴⁹.

⁴⁶ Hujatnika A., Zainsjah A. B., *Artist Collectives in The Post-1998 Indonesia: Resurgence, or a Turn (?)*, International Conference on Aesthetics and the Sciences of Art, 2020.

⁴⁷ Kolb R., Ritcher D., *documenta fifteen—Aspects of Commoning in Curatorial and Artistic Practices*, OnCurating, Issue 54, November 2022.

⁴⁸ Bodden M., *Dynamics and Tension of LEKRA's modern national theatre 1959-1965*, 2012.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

Following Sukarno's deposition in 1967 and the onset of Suharto's dictatorial regime, the contemporary art movement in Indonesia was subjected to severe restrictions. This period, known as the New Order (1966-1998), was characterized by a systematic anti-communist policy that extended to government surveillance of personal spaces and the repression of political opposition⁵⁰. This control was also extended to the arts, resulting in significant limitations on freedom of expression. The Communist Party and all affiliated organizations were banned, leading to the suppression of LEKRA and its members. The collective model of artistic production was gradually supplanted by the educational system established by art academies, and art, as well as cultural activities, were systematically depoliticized. Artworks became essential to the demands of the upper class and industrial society.

Nevertheless, the formation of artist groups persisted, and the establishment of GSRBI (Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia or Indonesian New Art Movement) in 1975 marked the emergence of an avant-garde impulse within collective artistic practice⁵¹. The group emphasized socio-political themes, everyday life, and the use of unconventional materials and experimental approaches. Its members aimed to challenge traditional artistic norms and embrace multimedia, performance, and installation art, demonstrating that art could serve as a powerful medium for addressing social and political issues, even under restrictive regimes.

Accused of corruption and abuse of power, Suharto was compelled to resign in 1998 under significant domestic and international pressures⁵². This event opened the way for a series of political reforms, including greater press freedom and increased civic participation. This transformative period (Reformasi) also witnessed the emergence of numerous new artistic and cultural initiatives, which played a crucial role in revitalizing Indonesia's art scene. Several collectives were established, producing new works while simultaneously supporting fellow artists. This form of communality remains particularly distinctive of Indonesian society even today, especially in cities such as Jakarta or Yogyakarta, where ethnic and cultural backgrounds play a central role in social relations.

⁵⁰ Treccani, cit.

⁵¹ Hujatnika A., Zainsjah A. B., cit., p. 258.

⁵² Treccani, cit.

However, even in the decades that followed, government support remained limited both in terms of funding and infrastructure, placing cultural initiatives in a precarious position. In response to this newfound freedom and persistent instability, artist collectives endeavored to develop a substitute model of support, rethinking the purpose of art and contributing to social and political discourse through the resonance of making art collectively. Within this context, numerous other collectives emerged⁵³ — including some that would later be invited to documenta fifteen — each characterized by distinct modes of operation and a rejection of the established art system. These collectives often engaged in activities that were varied and not confined to artistic practice. Many of them, such as Taring Padi (Yogyakarta, 1998) and ruangrupa (Jakarta, 2000), continue to maintain a significant presence on the international stage.

Founded by art students, the collective Taring Padi was gradually joined by students and activists from other disciplines. Through its collaborative and political approach, the group produces incisive works that often combine traditional Indonesian style with contemporary political messages⁵⁴, always using art as a tool for activism and public engagement.

The artist collective ruangrupa acted as initiator, organizer, curator, and manager, combining collaborative and individual practices. Their do-it-yourself approach reflected the expanded paradigm of contemporary art, embracing a wide array of ideas and media⁵⁵. Their approach was the product of the turbulent historical moment in which they emerged. “We were rich at heart but poor economically, and this is how we connected, in this research for a relation, a relation without means. As a family.”⁵⁶

These shared experiences fostered a strong bond and sense of solidarity among the members, serving as a driving force behind their projects. Building on this, ruangrupa developed a model that integrated “economy, social issues, culture, politics, working

⁵³ Among them were also, Forum Lenteng (Jakarta), Common Room (Bandung), Tromarama (Bandung), Video Lab (Bandung), Ruang Mes 56 (Yogyakarta), Jatiwangi Art Factory (Jatiwangi), WAFT (Surabaya), and Klinik Seni Taxu (Denpasar).

⁵⁴ documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, cit., p.193.

⁵⁵ Hujatnika A., Zainsjah A. B., cit., p. 261.

⁵⁶ Goltz S., *Collective Crafting in Post-Suharto Indonesia: A Journey with Ruangrupa from the Jakarta Institute of the Arts to Documenta Fifteen in Kassel*, Duke University Press, 2022.

ethics, and collaboration,”⁵⁷ thereby creating an ecosystem defined by a collective “living-working”⁵⁸ culture. As of today, this model is firmly grounded in the Indonesian values of mutual support and friendship and aims to overcome the traditional separation between art and life. As such, it can be described as an artist-run space that is not merely a shared studio or exhibition venue, but rather a hybrid system that combines both functions and extends well beyond them. From its inception, the organization was conceived in response to specific contextual conditions, seeking to grant individuals the creative autonomy to pursue their artistic practices while sustaining a strong collective ethos. This philosophy is encapsulated in the assertion that “each person contributes unique insights, much like a key unlocking the treasures of historical and cultural narratives.”⁵⁹ This approach is reflected in the words of a ruangrupa’s key member, Ade Darman:

“The decade after 1998 was a period of euphoria for the idea of openness and a new orientation on how social, cultural and political lives should be carried out. At the same time, artists from this generation created, explored and expanded their choice of expression in a more diverse artistic forms [...]. This exploration not only formed an intersection between high art and low art that was previously separated, but also made the approach to art practice more intense and ideological. Through collaborative approach, for example, an artist’s position, which was originally the centre of awareness and ideas, organically turns into a collaborator or mediator.”⁶⁰

This spirit found expression in ruangrupa’s first base, located on the southern periphery of Jakarta. The space functioned as an open, continuously active hub for gathering and exchange. By bringing together a studio, a library, a research laboratory, and a space for social gatherings within a single structure, it embodied the collective’s dynamic and fluid

⁵⁷ ruangrupa, *What is lumbung?*, cit.

⁵⁸ Ibidem.

⁵⁹ ruangrupa, *About*, ruangrupa.org, n.d., <https://www.ruangrupa.org/en/about> [Last access: April 23, 2026]

⁶⁰ Darmawan A., *Fixing the Chain of the Cycle of Ideas*, North Art Space, Jakarta, 2010.

approach to artistic and intellectual exchange⁶¹. Community-based art projects⁶² were conducted involving artists from different backgrounds and other disciplines — including the social sciences, politics, technology, and media — with the additional aim of fostering critical reflections on contemporary urban issues. Their efforts marked a significant move toward autonomy and artistic freedom. Given that, prior to this period, the formation of organizations or the promotion of self-organized events without the consent of the authorities would have been considered subversive, it becomes clear how profound and revolutionary ruangrupa's engagement has been.

After successfully establishing themselves as a creative community in Indonesia, ruangrupa joined RAIN (Rijksakademie Initiative International Network) in 2000, “a network of (visual) artists' initiatives from countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, set up by artists who are former participants of the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.”⁶³ Bringing together artists worldwide, RAIN “stimulates pluriform internationalisation”, aiming to encourage a further dialogue on “Western” and “non-Western”, as well as on “center and periphery”. Through this network, they amplify the circulation of art, ideas, techniques, cultural heritage, and knowledge among various artists' initiatives, providing a significant contribution both physically and virtually⁶⁴.

Thanks to the dynamic artistic community established by ruangrupa, the collective began initiating some important projects. One such project is OK.Video, launched in 2003 and held biennially as the “Indonesia Media Arts Festival” with the aim of understanding how video is used by artists, creatives, communities, and other agents of cultural production in the urban landscape of Jakarta⁶⁵. Another noteworthy project is ArtLab, a collaborative space where individual artists or interdisciplinary groups, both from Indonesia and abroad, can conduct research and produce creative collaborative works on urban and

⁶¹ ruangrupa, *About*, cit.

⁶² Such as exhibitions, art labs, festivals, research projects, workshops, and produces books, magazines and online publications.

⁶³ RAIN, *Rain Artists' Initiatives. Info*, r-a-i-n.net, n.d., <http://www.r-a-i-n.net/info/> [Last access: April 30, 2026]

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

⁶⁵ Close R., *Technology, Food, Community and Art: Looking Back on This Year's OK.Video - Indonesia Media Arts Festival in Jakarta*, The Artling, November 06, 2017, <https://theartling.com/en/artzine/okvideo-indonesia-media-arts-festival-jakarta/> [Last access: April 30, 2026]

media-related issues⁶⁶. In 2004, the Jakarta 32°C project was also launched as a platform for dialogue and networking, gathering ideas and experimental approaches from university students in Jakarta and neighboring areas, with a focus on contemporary art and culture. Each project undertaken by ruangrupa originates from the necessity to respond to specific needs within the artistic community, further extending to a rethinking of the traditional art canon and its renewal through new languages and tools. Another key moment was when ruangrupa joint Arts Collaboratory (AC), a platform established in 2007 by the Dutch foundations DOEN and Hivos, as a funding and knowledge-sharing program, among artist initiatives in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East⁶⁷. Following a revision of its mission in 2013, Arts Collaboratory reoriented its activities toward promoting “sustainable, collaborative, and open visual arts practices that contribute to social innovation and emphasize building translocal communities among participants”⁶⁸. As part of this phase, twenty-three organizations, including ruangrupa, were selected to constitute the core of the community. Since then, these entities have engaged in collaborative projects that bridge visual arts and social activism, as well as face-to-face meetings and a general assembly held almost every year in different countries⁶⁹.

By engaging in these collaborations, ruangrupa accessed a broader platform and expanded its opportunities. The collective has since been actively involved in numerous international collaborative projects and exhibitions. Among these are the Istanbul Biennial (2005), Singapore Biennial (2011), São Paulo Biennial (2014), Aichi Triennial (Nagoya, 2016), and Cosmopolis at the Centre Pompidou (Paris, 2017). In 2016, ruangrupa was invited to curate SONSBEK ’16 transACTION in Arnhem, the Netherlands. The following year, the group took part in documenta 14 with their online radio station, acting as a partner of *Every Time A Ear di Soun*, a decentralized radio project that brought together eight radio stations from around the world⁷⁰.

⁶⁶ Gudskul, *Art Lab*, gudskul.art, n.d., <https://gudskul.art/en/artlab/> [Last access: April 30, 2026]

⁶⁷ Arts Collaboratory, *History*, artscollaboratory.org, n.d., <https://artscollaboratory.org/history/> [Last access: May 4, 2026]

⁶⁸ Ibidem.

⁶⁹ documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, cit., p. 61.

⁷⁰ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *ruangrupa selected as Artistic Direction of documenta fifteen*, Press Release, Kassel, February 22, 2019.

Since 2013, ruangrupa and other Jakarta-based collectives have pursued the construction of *ekosistems* (Bahasa Indonesian for ecosystems), based on the recognition that even a collective cannot exist as an autonomous entity, but rather as an interdependent actor embedded within broader relational frameworks. The first iteration was named Gudang Sarinah Ekosistem (GSE), a cultural platform that functions as a multidisciplinary space, sustaining and nurturing an integrated support system for creative talents, diverse communities, and institutions. It operates as a site of collaborative engagement, knowledge circulation, and idea exchange, while promoting critical reflection, creativity, and innovative practices⁷¹.

This experience later evolved into Gudskul: Collective Study and Contemporary Art Ekosistem, a public learning space ruangrupa established with two other collectives, Serrum and Grafis Huru Hara, in 2018⁷². Gudskul functions as a collectively run space and school in South Jakarta, which “can be described as a collective of collectives”⁷³. It developed into an experimental pedagogical platform that provides a learning space for younger generations of artists and art collectives. It operates as a distinct segment within public education, offering a one-year, non-degree, accredited study program, and serves as a sustainable support system for the local art ecosystem⁷⁴. ruangrupa itself matured into a non-profit organization, with operational support for each collective primarily derived from donor institutions, sponsors, and internally generated income, complemented by voluntary contributions⁷⁵. As part of their decision to collaborate as an ecosystem, ruangrupa, Serrum, and Grafis Huru Hara instituted a “shared *lumbung* system.”⁷⁶

To introduce this concept, the term *lumbung*⁷⁷ is “the Indonesian word for a collectively governed rice barn, where the gathered harvest is stored for the common good of the

Further information about the project can be found at: <https://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/11085/every-time-a-ear-di-soun-a-documenta-14-radio-program-presentation>

⁷¹ ruangrupa, *About*, cit.

⁷² documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, cit, p.12.

⁷³ ruangrupa, *What is lumbung?*, cit.

⁷⁴ documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, cit., p. 108.

⁷⁵ ruangrupa, *About*, cit.

⁷⁶ Ibidem.

⁷⁷ See the *Glossary* in Appendix A.

community”⁷⁸, evoking a shared resource model oriented toward addressing an uncertain future. “As architecture, it can only remain relevant and sustainable if its users continuously renew and refill its resources.”⁷⁹ However, this concept should not be interpreted merely as a physical structure, but primarily as a mode of collective work and coexistence. It is an “everyday practice working amidst society,”⁸⁰ grounded in the sharing of resources and in the pursuit of collective well-being. More profoundly, it is “simply a way to be us, a way of living and being ourselves”⁸¹. This concept, therefore, expands and adapts to shape the artistic projects, decision-making processes, and community relations. Resources such as materials, funding, ideas, and workspace are collectively stored and managed, while any surplus is allocated according to the community’s needs, thereby guaranteeing equitable access for all members, particularly during periods of difficulty. This shared access to resources gives members the opportunity to undertake projects that might otherwise be difficult to realize individually. Through this collaborative framework, members develop new skills and capacities, extending their work into local communities and supporting both personal and collective progress. Moreover, this approach naturally extends to collaborations with other artists and organizations.

lumbung thus became the operational model during the preparation of documenta fifteen and was subsequently conceptualized and applied within curatorial practice. In this sense, Gudskul can be understood as a miniature model anticipating the structural and organizational framework later developed for documenta’s fifteenth edition.

⁷⁸ ruangrupa, *What is lumbung?*, cit.

⁷⁹ ruangrupa, Papastergiadis N., *Living Lumbung: The Shared Spaces of Art and Life*. ruangrupa and Nikos Papastergiadis in Conversation, e-flux Journal, Issue #118, May 2021.

⁸⁰ ruangrupa, *What is lumbung?*, cit.

⁸¹ Goltz S., cit.

1.3 The meeting point: an interdisciplinary platform of contemporary art.

“Nominated unanimously by the International Finding Committee, the Supervisory Board appointed ruangrupa, a collective of artists and creatives from Jakarta, Indonesia, with a ten-member core as the artistic direction of documenta fifteen.”⁸²

This was announced on February 22, 2019, by the general director of documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, Dr. Sabine Schormann, and published through the official communication channels of the art exhibition. For the first time, documenta was organized by an artist collective.

The unanimous decision was justified by the acknowledgement, on the part of the eight-member Finding Committee⁸³, of ruangrupa’s remarkable capacity to engage a wide range of communities and audiences, successfully attracting even those who are not usually interested in art. The collective was further recognized for its commitment to fostering local engagement and participation, with the expectation that — similarly to the dynamics emerging elsewhere — its independent, community-based organization could produce a substantial, innovative, and transformative force. In doing so, the Hessian Minister of Higher Education, Research and the Arts, Angela Dorn posits: “documenta is consciously giving room to the non-European view of the art world and bringing the world to Hesse in a completely new way”⁸⁴.

At this stage, consistent with their background, ruangrupa chose not to position themselves within documenta’s long-established system but instead invited documenta to become part of their *ekosistem* and operational process⁸⁵.

⁸² documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *ruangrupa selected as Artistic Direction of documenta fifteen*, cit.

⁸³ See the *Glossary* in Appendix A.

⁸⁴ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *ruangrupa selected as Artistic Direction of documenta fifteen*, cit.

⁸⁵ documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, cit., p.12.

“With this invitation, they made it clear that they did not perceive documenta as the unilaterally commissioning art institution, but as part of a community in which the distribution of resources is jointly organized.”⁸⁶

Following documenta’s agreement, ruangrupa extended invitations to diverse participants. In *lumbung* spirit, they initially selected the members who would form the Artistic Team⁸⁷, alongside a network of organizations and collectives — the *lumbung members*⁸⁸. The selection focused on individuals, artists, and initiatives whose approaches embodied the *lumbung* principles and whose artistic practices were firmly grounded in local social structures.

More specifically, the Artistic Team was formed with the intention of sharing roles, authorship, work, and ideas. In line with their belief in friendship, ruangrupa extended invitations to individuals with whom they had shared experiences over the previous twenty years. Five individuals from Kassel, Amsterdam, Jerusalem, and Møn⁸⁹. Among them was Gertrude Flentge, a long-time friend with whom they have shared schools, residencies, and artistic projects, including Arts Collaboratory. Frederikke Hansen and Lara Khaldi, with whom they have collaborated in various contexts and on multiple occasions over the years. Hansen — one half of the curatorial collective Kuratorisk Aktion — has been in dialogue with them since the early 2000s through sustained exchanges between South and North. Khaldi first connected with them in 2015 during a visit to Jakarta with the De Appel Curatorial Programme, and her practice immediately demonstrated a strong affinity with that of ruangrupa. Since only one member of ruangrupa had prior experience with documenta and the city of Kassel, establishing local connections was essential. In this context, Ayşe Güleç and Andrea Linnenkohl acted as crucial intermediaries connecting institutions, ruangrupa, and the social and cultural landscape of Kassel. Ayşe Güleç brought her expertise from participation in earlier editions of documenta and her long-standing commitment to activism within Kassel

⁸⁶ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta 15*, documenta.de, n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta-fifteen> [Last access: May 7, 2026]

⁸⁷ See the *Glossary* in Appendix A.

⁸⁸ See the *Glossary* in Appendix A.

⁸⁹ documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, cit., p.16.

communities, while Andrea Linnenkohl contributed extensive experience through her work with various documenta-related institutions and previous exhibitions⁹⁰.

The *lumbung members* counted fourteen collectives from around the world with diverse backgrounds, invited not only to participate in documenta fifteen, but to co-create its *lumbung* framework. This international network was constituted by the collectives Britto Arts Trust, FAFSWAG, Fondation Festival Sur Le Niger, Gudskul, INLAND, Instituto de Artivismo Hannah Arendt, Jatiwangi Art Factory, Más Arte Más Acción, OFF-Biennale, Project Art Works, The Question of Funding, Trampoline House, Wajukuu Art Project, ZK/U – Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik.

Britto Arts Trust (Bangladesh): an artist-run, non-profit contemporary art hub founded in 2002. The project explores historical and cultural contexts to better understand Bangladesh's socio-political upheavals and provides support and infrastructure for local practitioners⁹¹.

FAFSWAG (New Zealand/Aotearoa): an Indigenous queer artist collective founded in 2013. The group works across the Pacific Islands, connecting the region's diverse cultural and social contexts. Through an interdisciplinary practice, they aim to challenge the underrepresentation of Queer and Indigenous people in the creative industries⁹².

Fondation Festival Sur Le Niger (Ségou, Mali): a cultural institution founded in 2009 to consolidate and expand the success of the Festival sur le Niger, an international music and contemporary art event held in Ségou. Its work is grounded in the traditional Maaya philosophy and guided by values such as generosity, hospitality, and humor⁹³.

Gudskul (Jakarta, Indonesia): an educational knowledge-sharing platform founded in 2018 by the Jakarta-based collectives ruangrupa, Serrum, and Grafis Hura Hara, as previously noted. They propose learning methods based on informality, sharing, and collaborative practice⁹⁴.

⁹⁰ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *documenta fifteen and lumbung practice*, Press kit, June 18, 2020.

⁹¹ documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, cit., p. 76.

⁹² Ivi, p. 97.

⁹³ Ivi, p. 102.

⁹⁴ Ivi, p. 108.

INLAND (various locations, Spain): a para-institution created in 2009 that operates at the intersection of art, territories, and social change. It provides a platform for diverse actors engaged in agricultural, social, and cultural production⁹⁵.

Instituto de Artivismo Hannah Arendt (Cuba): originated from an artistic action of collective reading of Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) in Havana, Cuba, in 2015. The institute promotes civic literacy and social justice⁹⁶.

Jatiwangi Art Factory (Jatiwangi, Indonesia): a community organization established in 2005 that integrates contemporary arts and cultural practices in the everyday life of rural areas, involving the local public in a wide range of activities⁹⁷.

Más Arte Más Acción (Nuquí, Chocó, Colombia): a nonprofit cultural foundation that develops ambitious interdisciplinary projects dedicated to protecting the ecosystem and preserving cultural traditions⁹⁸.

OFF-Biennale (Budapest, Hungary): a grassroots initiative started in 2015 that seeks to establish an independent, resilient, and non-governmental model for working in the cultural sector⁹⁹.

Project Art Works (UK): a collective of artists and makers founded in 1997 that explores collaborative forms of creative freedom, visibility, and advocacy alongside people with complex support needs. Through a wide range of artistic and holistic practices, the collective works to strengthen understanding, representation, and rights for neurominorities¹⁰⁰.

The Question of Funding (Palestine): a collective of cultural producers and community organizers founded in 2019 that focuses on the cultural economy in Palestine. They reimagine the concept of funding in order to develop alternative institutional structures and economic models based on the principles of justice and solidarity¹⁰¹.

Trampoline House (Copenhagen, Denmark): a space founded in 2010 by a group of artists, curators, refugee rights advocates, and asylum seekers to give advocacy to people

⁹⁵ Ivi, p.116.

⁹⁶ Ivi, p. 120.

⁹⁷ Ivi, p. 124.

⁹⁸ Ivi, p. 148.

⁹⁹ Ivi, p. 159.

¹⁰⁰ Ivi, p. 169.

¹⁰¹ Ivi, p. 200.

facing a restrictive asylum system. The projects provide a wide range of support, from legal advice and language courses to meals and dance activities¹⁰².

Wajukuu Art Project (Kenya): a community-based organization established in 2004 by a group of artists with the aim of regenerating Lunga-Lunga — a neighborhood in the Mukuru slum of Nairobi — and transforming it into a place where people can live with dignity. The projects are anchored in the conservation and reinvention of cultural heritage and are developed in collaboration with the local population¹⁰³.

ZK/U – Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik (Berlin, Germany): an artist and research residency opened in 2012. They translate global discourses into local practices, exploring the role of art as a catalyst for transformation in urban spaces.¹⁰⁴

The Artistic Team of documenta fifteen in conversation with the *lumbung members* initiated the process of *lumbung* making¹⁰⁵. They have developed a common pot of resources together. Each member contributed their surplus resources, such as people, time, space, food, money, knowledge, skill, care, and art. A form of sharing aimed at the collective learning of diverse concepts and models of regeneration, education, and economy practiced in different parts of the world. To support this process, the principles of the *lumbung economy* were effectively put into practice, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Production budgets and seed funds were distributed equally among the artists, while each group also managed a common budget and made financial decisions collectively¹⁰⁶.

In August 2019, ruangrupa and the Artistic Team of documenta fifteen convened for their first meeting in West Java. Over the course of three days and two nights, the groups collaborated while practicing *nongkrong*¹⁰⁷ (an Indonesian term meaning “hanging out together”) as a relational approach intended to foster trust and mutual understanding through relaxed interactions, dialogue, and sharing of time, ideas, or food. An approach that enables all participants to express their views without being judged, fostering constructive debate and collaboration in order to reach unified conclusions.

¹⁰² Ivi, p. 205.

¹⁰³ Ivi, p. 208.

¹⁰⁴ Ivi, p. 219.

¹⁰⁵ ruangrupa, *What is lumbung?*, cit.

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁷ See the *Glossary* in Appendix A.

This meeting aimed to explore the practice of *lumbung* as the conceptual foundation of documenta fifteen, particularly in relation to how its core values could have shaped the framework of the exhibition. Interdisciplinary approaches were essential to this process. As activities and spaces develop, social relationships and interactions emerge and evolve organically. This dynamic illustrates how an arts organization can become embedded within its community, positioning itself as an active part of its environment¹⁰⁸. As a starting point, ruangrupa and the Artistic Team developed a set of guiding principles. Eight key terms enclose the essence of this collaboration: humor, generosity, curiosity, sufficiency, independence, local anchoring, transparency, and regeneration¹⁰⁹. Humor serves as a tool to foster joy and to ease tensions within interpersonal interactions. Generosity is a fundamental principle that encourages members to share resources. Curiosity facilitates the process of getting to know one another and actively listening to others. It is essential that members of the *lumbung* feel a sense of sufficiency rooted in their own identity and existence, maintaining independence from outside pressures to the extent possible. Each organization grounds its activities in particular needs, knowledge, and relationships anchored in its local context, raising deep and meaningful collaborations as well as the exchange of ideas. Transparency is crucial in building trust among the collectives. Finally, regeneration reflects the internal dynamics of the ecosystem; the ongoing process of adapting, re-inventing, and regenerating itself in relation to its context. Accordingly, all actions and decisions made by the group align with these values. Each of the *lumbung values* was further explored in the seven-part conversation series, *lumbung calling*¹¹⁰, which later inaugurated the public program *Meydan*¹¹¹. These meetings aimed to explore the meaning of *lumbung* in depth, presenting it through an artistic lens and across a range of disciplines, perspectives, and contexts.

¹⁰⁸ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Lumbung*, Press kit, August 22, 2022.

¹⁰⁹ ruangrupa, *What is lumbung?*, cit.

¹¹⁰ See the *Glossary* in Appendix A.

¹¹¹ See the *Glossary* in Appendix A.

Mechanisms for the management and distribution of shared resources were developed through regular assemblies, referred to as *majelis*¹¹², and through dedicated working groups. *Majelis*, in fact, functioned as a learning space where there was no competition. Participants also discussed forms and ways of communication within the *lumbung*, as well as strategies for collaboration over the ensuing months. These discussions and *majelis* assemblies were documented in *harvest*¹¹³, an artistic method of recording words, knowledge, and experiences through images and drawings — materials that subsequently figured in the handbook and were integrated into various exhibition venues. Each *majelis* was intended to be held in a different city and hosted by *lumbung* members. An important factor, however, was the unexpected arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic, which affected organizational plans and timeline (Figure 2) as originally proposed.

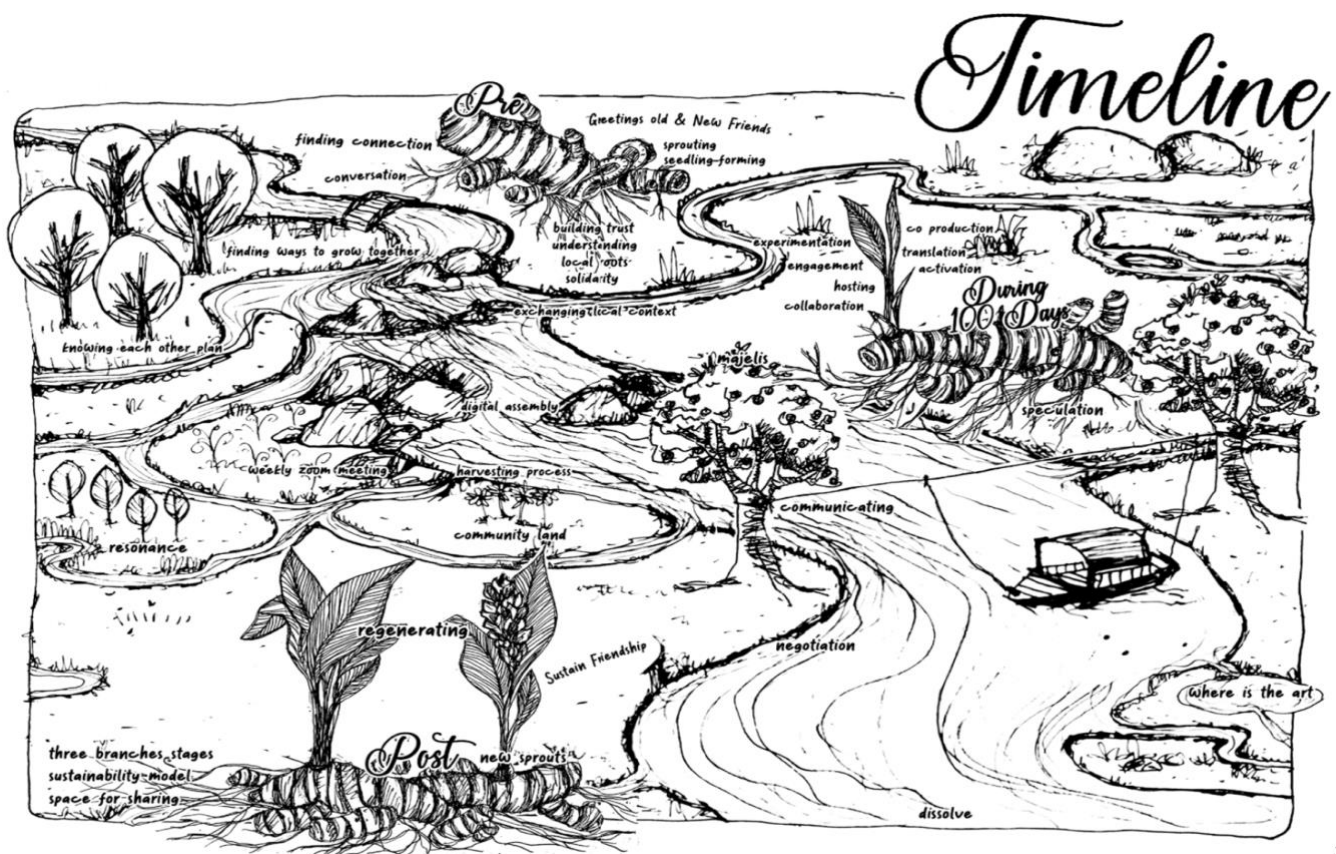


Figure 2. Harvest drawing by Daniella F Praptono

Source: documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, Hatje Cantz, Kassel, 2022, p.15

¹¹² See the *Glossary* in Appendix A.

¹¹³ See the *Glossary* in Appendix A.

The third *majelis*, for example, was supposed to take place in March 2020 in Kassel, but due to the state of emergency, it was held online on Zoom. By then, many of the members had already travelled extensively for research, and some viewed the shift to digital as a blessing — a chance to reflect on the importance of reducing travel, both to lower carbon footprint and to prioritize self-care¹¹⁴.

Subsequently, in October 2020, the *lumbung members* also convened in a virtual assembly, during which they introduced themselves and shared their stories, ideas, and preliminary projections for the coming years. The assembly lasted four days and included productive dialogues regarding collaborative practices and the prospective development of documenta fifteen¹¹⁵. For instance, one of the fourteen *lumbung members*, Question of Funding (QoF) from Palestine, represented by Yazan, introduced themselves through a Zoom performance. They performed a song and invited the other members to join in afterwards. For several years, the collective has been working on the issue of funding and has articulated the idea of creating sustainable income in order for the community to become independent from donors.

The *lumbung members* created a surplus through the *majelising* and working groups, and this surplus was shared with others. A network of *lumbung members*, called *lumbung inter-lokal*¹¹⁶, was thus established to develop shared mechanisms and infrastructures, which were subsequently disseminated throughout their respective ecosystems and among the group of fifty-three *lumbung artists*¹¹⁷ invited by the Artistic Team at a later stage. These new participants broadened the project's scope, contributing a rich array of perspectives and creative energies.

Instead of holding frequent *majelis* with all participants — both in person and online at periodic intervals — it was decided to establish organizational processes through regular digital meetings and working groups for the fourteen *lumbung members*, alongside “mini-majelis”¹¹⁸ for the *lumbung artists*.

¹¹⁴ ruangrupa, *What is lumbung?*, cit.

¹¹⁵ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Harvest. First lumbung assembly*, documenta-fifteen.de, n.d., <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/harvest-first-lumbung-assembly/> [Last access: May 8, 2026]

¹¹⁶ See the *Glossary* in Appendix A.

¹¹⁷ See the *Glossary* in Appendix A.

¹¹⁸ See the *Glossary* in Appendix A.

The latter consisted of small assemblies of four to five artists, including both individuals and collectives (Figure 3). These meetings, influenced by participants' different time zones, facilitated mutual understanding through experimentation with collective decision-making processes and various forms of resource sharing.

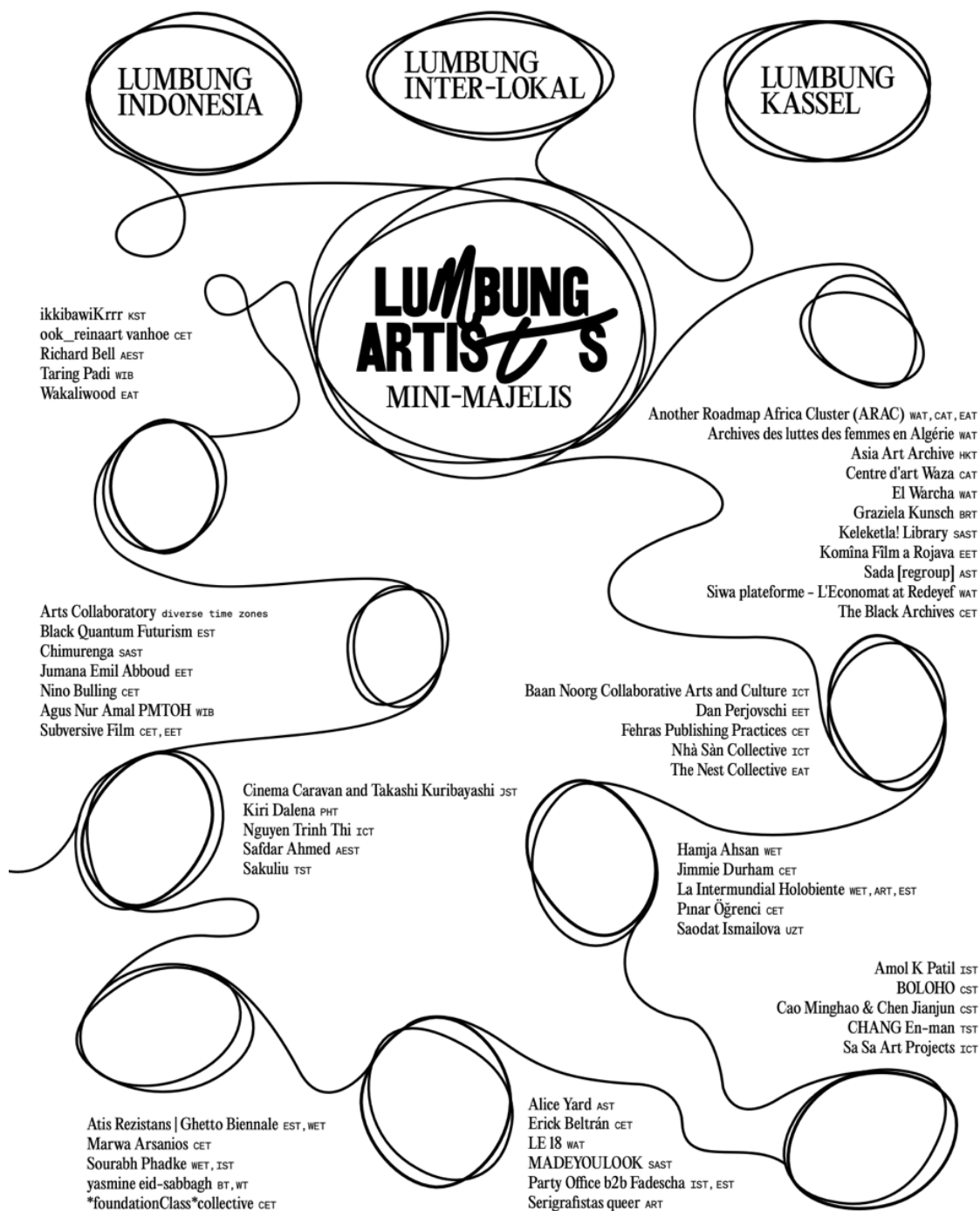


Figure 3. Example diagram of the subdivision into mini-majelis.

Source: ruangrupa, *What is lumbung?*, Asphalt, No. 1, 2021.

The first *mini-majelis* was convened in February 2021. While the Artistic Team initially met with the groups on several occasions, responsibility for determining the frequency and format of the meetings was subsequently delegated to the artists and the curatorial assistant. Importantly, they were also entrusted with establishing procedures for managing shared resources, collectively referred to as the “common pot”. Participants adopted different approaches to running the *majelis* and facilitating decision-making processes. For example, one group held meetings over dinner via Zoom, engaging in in-depth discussions about their culinary recipes as well as their artistic practices. Another group adopted the *agraw*, an assembly practice from the North African Amazigh tradition, characterized by a circular spatial arrangement in which a moderator moves around the circle, and participants signal their intention to speak by interrupting the moderator. These meetings occurred over a period of approximately one and a half years, with some groups meeting online and others managing to convene in Kassel¹¹⁹.

The *lumbung members* and *lumbung artists*, in turn, extended invitations to other artists to access shared resources and contribute to the exhibition¹²⁰.

Moreover, at irregular intervals, all those involved in documenta fifteen convened in a large gathering called *majelis akbar*¹²¹. “Working as collectives of collectives is being tried out in practice.”¹²² The online meetings convened approximately 150 to 200 artists and members. These assemblies were designed to reflect the horizontal and participatory ethos of *ruangrupa*, facilitating the development of collaborative projects and enabling participants to articulate practices of solidarity through the collective sharing of space, knowledge, programming, and equipment across the 100-day period. The Japanese group Cinema Caravan, for instance, exemplified this approach by opening its cinema for collective use. The *majelis akbar* also constituted an important site for addressing locally grounded concerns among *lumbung members*, fostering exchange, and building solidaristic relations¹²³.

¹¹⁹ documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, cit., p.32.

¹²⁰ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta 15*, cit.

¹²¹ See the *Glossary* in Appendix A.

¹²² *ruangrupa*, *What is lumbung?*, cit.

¹²³ In January 2022, accusations of anti-Semitism from a Kassel blog and later amplified by German media prompted internal discussions among participants of documenta fifteen. The *majelis akbar*, in this sense, was particularly important as a place where members could discuss collective responses and forms of

Meeting in both small and large working groups represents a key modality through which the *lumbung process* unfolds.

It was only in June 2021 that the members of the Artistic Team were able to meet in person in Kassel for the first time, following a year and a half of communication and collaboration exclusively through digital platforms. At the same time, several *lumbung members* and *lumbung artists* also visited Kassel, where they met one another as well as many Kassel-based collectives.

Furthermore, the documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH management, together with the Board and the Artistic Team, made the important decision not to postpone documenta fifteen despite the pandemic¹²⁴. Given the uncertainty of when and for whom better conditions might arise, they deemed it necessary to proceed in a manner that responded to the current circumstances, rather than postponing action. As outlined earlier, the working methodology initially planned prior to the pandemic was later revised in response to it. This shift affected not only the internal dynamics but even more significantly, the process of building the *lumbung*. At that point, building and resource sharing began not only necessary, but also extremely urgent. The *lumbung* approach and its values emerged as not merely essential but uniquely capable of both embracing and confronting the crisis, thanks to its versatility and its broad, inclusive concept of sharing. In times marked by experiences of inequality and injustice in current system, *lumbung* might serve to demonstrate that alternative modes of organization and practice are possible. “We are therefore not suspending *lumbung* but accelerating it.”¹²⁵

Since its foundation, ruangrupa has committed its own spaces and resources to fostering environments where young people can meet, share ideas, experiment, and collaborate, with the aim of generating new approaches to contemporary art within the urban context of Jakarta. In line with this ethos, the collective invited students from both Kassel and Jakarta to contribute to the development of the visual identity for documenta fifteen. Out of more than twenty submissions, a jury comprising members of ruangrupa, documenta

support within *lumbung* framework. documenta subsequently issued public statements rejecting the accusations and reaffirming its opposition to anti-Semitism and racism, while emphasizing the importance of freedom of expression in art and culture.

documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, cit., p.27.

¹²⁴ ruangrupa, *What is lumbung?*, cit.

¹²⁵ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *documenta fifteen and lumbung practice*, cit.

und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, and the Artistic Team selected two winning proposals. The Jakarta-based group, Studio 4oo2, was entrusted with designing the exhibition's primary visual identity, whereas the Kassel team, kmmn_practice, was tasked with developing an open-access platform to encourage public participation in specific aspects of the exhibition's visual design¹²⁶ and implementing their participatory approach to the visual appearance of the ruruHaus¹²⁷. Inspired by the lumbung paradigm central to documenta, which foregrounds collective practices of sharing, solidarity, and friendship, Studio 4oo2 adopted the motif of hands. This representation expresses the attitude and gesture of *lumbung*, while also conveying a boundless communal society oriented toward a sustainable future. The design's chromatic choices were inspired by natural fabric dyes traditionally utilized in Indonesian textile products, particularly eastern Indonesia, where lumbung remains an active cultural practice.

Studio 4oo2 on the Visual Design:

"The lumbung concept is visualized in our design by the shape of the hand, a feeling part of our bodies, which is used in human activities such as holding, giving or hugging. The hand, directly or indirectly, plays an essential role in interactive processes between people. As a symbol it is directly linked to the concept of lumbung, a collective repository for the harvest produced by a community. These activities – harvesting, togetherness, sustainable support – all require the involvement of hands, just as the purpose of lumbung refers to the hand that connects people"¹²⁸.

¹²⁶ Ibidem.

¹²⁷ See the *Glossary* in Appendix A.

¹²⁸ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *documenta fifteen presents Visual Identity*, Press Release, Kassel, December 15, 2020.



Figure 4. documenta fifteen: poster, Kassel, 2022

Source: documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta fifteen*, documenta.de, n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta-fifteen>

Chapter II

The core ideas of documenta: an analytical syllabus.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the concept of *lumbung* strongly influences both ruangrupa's approach and the framework of the fifteenth edition of documenta. By underscoring collaboration, resource sharing, and equitable distribution, this system advances a management model particularly attentive to the wider notion of sustainability. In this context, art functions as a means to encourage and generate new ways of addressing issues related to space, economics, education, and ecology.

The following syllabus, therefore, examines *lumbung* as an artistic and economic model within the framework of the exhibition, while continuing an awareness that it is a concept whose relevance extends well beyond it. As conceived by ruangrupa, "Ideally, *lumbung* can be a model that can be owned, adapted, developed, and utilised by many, without rigid control."¹²⁹

2.1 Curatorial approach.

The discussion of collective curatorship should begin by conceding the role of ruangrupa in developing the trajectory initiated by director Okwui Enwezor at documenta 11, in 2002 — an edition in which, as we have seen, ruangrupa participated with its Internet radio project. Okwui Enwezor pursued a redefinition of the structure and meaning of art institutions according to a globalized and, potentially, decolonized perspective on art¹³⁰. Enwezor redefined curatorial practice by moving beyond the traditional model of a single curatorial "auteur" and individual vision¹³¹. He assembled a team of curators to collaboratively develop the conceptual framework of the exhibition. Although Enwezor held the position of Artistic Director, he emphasized shared authorship, building a

¹²⁹ Ade darmawan statement on Yalçınkaya Can T., *Making Friends as Labour: The Political Economy of the Lumbung in Documenta Fifteen*, Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art, vol. 24, no. 1, 2024.

¹³⁰ Gardner A., Green C., *Post-North? Documenta 11 and the Challenges of the "Global" Exhibition*, On Curating, Issue 33, June 2027.

¹³¹ O'Neil P., *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, United States, 2012, p.79.

curatorial environment that better represents multiple viewpoints and responds to global complexities by leveraging the different competencies and views of team members.

Another point to consider is ruangrupa's first experiment with the role of collective art director during the exhibition SONSBECK'16 — an event held in Sonsbeek Park and various venues throughout the city of Arnhem, the Netherlands, since 1949. The direction was entrusted to ruangrupa precisely because their grassroots approach appeared ideally suited to the purpose of bringing art to the people. This edition, entitled "transACTION," focused primarily on connection, interaction, and participation, conceiving a dynamic and socially engaged form of art¹³². The participatory process actively involved both the city and its inhabitants, to the extent that the public was invited to use the artworks for various activities¹³³. The interaction began in July 2015, when ruangrupa established ruruhuis in the city center as a dynamic hub for collaborating with the local community. Ruruhuis¹³⁴ can be considered the precedent experiment of what would later be presented as the ruruHaus for documenta fifteen. Conceived as a space for artists and local residents to meet, gather, and exchange ideas, ruruhuis became a site for tireless exploration. ruangrupa members visited local venues and collected stories from football teams, community centers, and park visitors. Simultaneously, they started the process of selecting artists. This feedback from the city was central to their practice and, together with a collective vision, also informed the selection of artists — as would later be the case for documenta fifteen. Already in this earlier experience, it is possible to observe how ruangrupa was able to contest conventional curatorial approaches by transforming the exhibition space into an interdisciplinary and collaborative environment.

¹³² SONSBECK, *Archive, Soonsbeek 2016: Transaction*, sonsbeek.org, n.d.,

<https://sonsbeek.org/en/archive/sonsbeek-2016-transaction> [Last access: May 27, 2026]

¹³³ Through an open call, members of the public were invited to temporarily appropriate and utilize selected works, without the intervention of either artist or curator. For instance, Eko Prawoto's bamboo pavilion served as a venue for weddings and communal cooking and dining activities were organized in Alphons ter Avest's Bakehouse.

Cousijin M., *Peeing on a work of art? If it's a statement, fine*. De Correspondent, 13 June, 2026,

<https://decorrespondent.nl/4712/over-een-kunstwerk-heen-plassen-als-het-een-statement-is-prima/e32fcc17-3dc4-04b9-26f6-0f7a2fe68a6c> [Last access: May 27, 2026]

¹³⁴ The first *ruruhuis* was established in 2009 in Utrecht, when ruangrupa was invited to the "The Grand Domestic Revolution" project, at Casco Art Institute.

In light of the above, ruangrupa's work in documenta fifteen represents a further development of these precedents.

The concept of *lumbung* continues to represent the foundational principle guiding ruangrupa's collective practice. In order to sincerely embody this spirit, they extended their invitation beyond their own community, establishing that interdisciplinary platform of contemporary art analyzed in the first chapter. As ruangrupa remarked: "This way, we were sure that documenta fifteen would not be solely ruangrupa but would also belong to others."¹³⁵ From the outset, questions were raised about how to scale up the *lumbung* practice, originally intended for small communities, to a large-scale contemporary art exhibition, guaranteeing it did not become a mechanistic system. Since at least 2020, ruangrupa has established three networks: *lumbung inter-lokal* (the international network of lumbung members), *Kassel ekosistem* (a collaborative network supporting and sharing various projects and programs in Kassel), and *lumbung Indonesia* (a platform for Indonesian art collectives practicing lumbung across the country). To initiate the *Kassel ekosistem*, for instance, two ruangrupa members, Reza Afisina and Iswanto Hartono, moved to Kassel with their families in 2020. This effort, undertaken with the aim of creating a stronger connection between Jakarta and the host city, is without precedent in documenta's history and is a rarity among biennials. The level of local engagement achieved is thus remarkable¹³⁶.

In implementing this project, ruangrupa engaged not only curators but also artists and local communities, thereby developing a curatorial model that is distinct from centralized forms of curatorship and from individualistic, market-driven frameworks, and instead accentuates the importance of collaboration and mutual support. This critique is manifest in their motto: make friends, not art. Notably, the challenge of bringing together hundreds of artists and collectives whose modus operandi is self-organizing, with an institution as hierarchical, top-down, and bureaucratic as documenta, proved to be a difficult task. This meant importing process-oriented artistic practices focused on community formation, as opposed to individual artistic vision, into the context of a neoliberal Western art system¹³⁷.

¹³⁵ documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, cit.

¹³⁶ Richter D., *Curatorial Commons? A Paradigm Shift on documenta fifteen – aspect of commoning in curatorial and artistic practices*, ON Curating, Issue 54, November 2022, p.34.

¹³⁷ documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, cit., p.30.

They built a participatory, horizontal structure in which curatorial responsibilities and decision-making were shared among the wide network of participants. The aim was to ensure that governance remained participatory and balanced among all members.

With reference to Ade Darmawan words:

“ruangrupa is not a curator in the traditional sense with curatorial muscle that is very centred, our approach was many times misread as slow, indecisive, or even vague. One can see it as a curatorial method as well, but for us, it is just us being us, being ruangrupa. It’s how we as an organism live and survive.”¹³⁸

It is consequently apparent that for ruangrupa, curatorial practice is intrinsically connected to their collective identity and way of being. It represents an authentic manifestation of their everyday life and work as a collective. Their curatorial approach is guided by their dedication to a shared, communal mode of operating. It emphasizes collective input and process over product and prioritizes long-term sustainability rather than short-term achievements. Consequently, documenta fifteen was conceived not as a theme-based exhibition, but rather as one grounded in the practices that link the participating artists and collectives to the concept of *lumbung*. The focus was therefore placed on how the various artists engage within their respective local contexts, the values guiding their work, and their involvement in social and political movements, rather than solely on the final artistic outputs. “it is meaningless to exhibit the objects in Kassel without finding translations of the process that give rise to them.”¹³⁹ As evidence of the process, the meetings, the modes of thinking, and the methodologies that led to the final result, the *harvest* is present throughout the exhibition. These artistic records were originally intended to share the discussions held during assemblies, first with absent members, and subsequently with the general public. *Harvest* can take the form of graphic recordings, creative writing, or even internet memes, such as those by artist and curatorial assistant Cem A.

¹³⁸ Yalçınkaya Can T., *cit.*

¹³⁹ documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, *cit.*, pp. 30,31.

Within this “caring ecosystem,”¹⁴⁰ two things are important: the process and the infrastructure. This is evident in the words of the ruangrupa’s member Iswanto Hartono:

“For example, the Rotunda in the Fridericianum, with the library and the common space, was designed by us with the artists and the production team as well. This infrastructure, as a part of the process, started from the intangible one, since we have never been imposing to create such infrastructures. The ecosystem naturally evolved from those processes.”¹⁴¹

Moreover, all members are encouraged to participate in open dialogue, share creative contributions, promote innovative ideas, and support democratic principles, all of which reflect the core values of *lumbung*¹⁴². Local anchoring, for instance, was demonstrated by encouraging artists to continue their existing practices and to bring to documenta what they were already undertaking in their local contexts. In this way, they had the opportunity to translate their practices to Kassel, while also presenting ongoing work to a larger audience of potential users¹⁴³. Central to the vision is ruangrupa’s collective philosophy, based on the belief that art and life are inseparable. At documenta fifteen, they also introduced the Indonesian practice of *nongkrong*, encouraging both artists and visitors to interact as friends. Through this approach, the boundaries between work, leisure, art, and life became increasingly fluid¹⁴⁴.

As a result, the curatorial outcome shifts the focus from the exhibition as a static display of products to a dynamic, evolving process that directly engages the community and responds to its sociopolitical context. The contributions of *lumbung artists* and *lumbung*

¹⁴⁰ Guida C., Maggiolo D., Pietronave P., *Taking care of Ecosystem through the Lumbung Process and the intangible infrastructure. A Conversation with: Reza Afisina, Iswanto Hartono, and Bellina Erby (from ruangrupa and Gudskul Ecosystem, Jakarta Indonesia)*, Milan, Italy, 13 and 14 May 2023, <https://www.roots-routes.org/taking-care-of-ecosystems-through-the-lumbung-process-and-intangible-infrastructures-a-conversation-with-reza-afisina-iswanto-hartono-and-bellina-erby-from-ruangrupa-and-gudskul-ecosystem-jakarta/> [Last access: May 28, 2026]

¹⁴¹ Ibidem.

¹⁴² ruangrupa and Nikos Papastergiadis in *Conversation: Living Lumbung: The Shared Spaces of Art and Life*, E-flux Journal, Issue #118, May 2021, p. 02.

¹⁴³ documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, cit., pp. 30,31.

¹⁴⁴ Yalçınkaya Can T., *cit.*

members themselves continue to evolve during the exhibition period and beyond. Accordingly, the space also became a space to be used, rather than merely observed. This approach not only redefines the traditional rules of an exhibition's framework but also democratizes the space, enhancing its accessibility and relevance for a wider audience. The processual and sustainability-oriented character of the working methods led to the participatory creation of spaces, as exemplified by the practice of the Living Room. It can be understood as the result of an intersection between everyday life and artistic labor — an element deeply embedded in ruangrupa's practices since the very beginning. On one hand, it emerged in response to the lack of art infrastructures in Jakarta; on the other, the collective developed during the New Order regime, when public space was controlled, and private houses became the safest space for gathering. The living room thus became the central space, functioning as a communal area for socializing, sleeping, meetings, workshops, and exhibitions. It was a space that constantly adapted and transformed over the course of the day and the night in response to different necessities. As Reza Afisina remarks in an interview: "We don't want to impose the *Living Room* as a method, because it's always everywhere anyhow: the most important thing regarding this particular space is that it's a safe place, that's how we connect within us, growing up towards these notions of artistic practices, especially in the sense of expressions."¹⁴⁵ In this sense, the exhibition space loses its character as a site of static contemplation — understood in the Benjaminian sense of aura — and instead acquires a more informal, dynamic atmosphere through actively involving the artists, thus becoming capable of attracting a wider and more heterogeneous audience.

The exhibition space was activated by artists and collectives who, on the one hand, effectively curated the space as a gathering place (as in the Gudskul area at the Fridericianum, as will be seen below) and on the other, involved the audience in a playful manner, while still attempting to create a co-learning environment. As reported in a testimony from the audience: "We experienced ourselves how easy it was to engage in a discussion over tea, cooked and served as a tool for starting a discussion in the gudskul area at Fridskul."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Guida C., Maggiolo D., Pietronave P., *cit.*

¹⁴⁶ Kolb R., *documenta fifteen's Lumbung: The Bumpy Road on the Third Way: Fragmentary Thoughts on the Threats and Troubles of Commons and Commoning in Contemporary Art and Knowledge Production on*

In addition, the activation of the space was supported by the *sobat-sobat* (Indonesian for friends). This team corresponds to what traditional institutions refer to as art mediators. It included more than 100 people from diverse backgrounds, most of whom were residents of Kassel. Their role was to mediate the knowledge between visitors and artists. The *sobat-sobat*¹⁴⁷ were considered an important creative part of *lumbung*: “Through their hosting and harvesting process, knowledge production and dissemination happen everywhere organically, inseparable from the art.”¹⁴⁸

The artworks on display promoted critical reflection on current issues and contributed to finding solutions that benefit the community. While some works were situational and relational (Figure 1), aiming to generate new relationships, others employed more traditional media and were exhibited in conventional ways (Figure 2)¹⁴⁹.



Figure 5. *documenta 15: Nang Yai (shadow puppets) carving workshop, Baan Norg Collaborative Arts, documenta Halle, Kassel, 2022, Photo: Nils Klinger*

Source: documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta 15*, documenta.de, n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta-fifteen>

documenta fifteen – aspect of commoning in curatorial and artistic practices, ON Curating, Issue 54, November 2022, p. 63.

¹⁴⁷ See the Glossary in Appendix A.

¹⁴⁸ *documenta fifteen, Handbook*, cit., pp. 39.

¹⁴⁹ Kolb R., cit., p. 85.

Figure 2. *documenta 15: Amol K Patil, Black Masks on Roller Skate, 2022, Hübner Areal, Kassel, 2022, Photo: Nils Klinge*

Source: documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta 15*, documenta.de, n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta-fifteen>



2.2 Venues.

As previously discussed at length, the establishment of the space constitutes a significant element of ruangrupa's "manifesto". It is conceived as a site for gathering and for observing the surrounding reality, from which collective action within these contexts can take root. In this edition, the city of Kassel is not understood as an exhibition venue, but rather as an *ekosistem* — "a network of social contexts in which documenta emerges and grows."¹⁵⁰ Drawing on Kassel's historical relevance as an industrial area that was later subjected to extensive destruction during World War II, and remains associated with the armaments industry, documenta took place in sites marked by historical and social resonance, thereby repositioning them within new interpretive frameworks.

The process of venue selection prioritized functionality, aligning artists with spaces suited to their specific practices, functional needs, and intended purposes.

Venue assignment occurred through an adaptive process. In some cases, the needs of various collectives at times converged within the same spaces. From this perspective, it was important to consider the venues as resources within the *lumbung* common pot. In this context, artists' spaces are not isolated showcases but components of the larger

¹⁵⁰ documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, cit., p. 227.

ekosistem, where collaborative interactions and reciprocal support are fostered. Rather than functioning merely as sites for art display, common spaces served as kitchens, meeting rooms, libraries, and even dormitories, highlighting the communal character of the environment.

Operationally, *ruangrupa* advanced a strategy directed at redistributing and decentralizing exhibition venues. Traditionally, centrally situated venues like the Fridericianum and documenta Halle have been considered the core of documenta and are, accordingly, the primary, or sometimes only, sites visited by audiences. In contrast, this edition tried to disrupt this conventional audience perspective by intentionally shifting the center to the *lumbung* building, where resources for the common pot were harvested. The focal points include the Mitte district of Kassel, known for its concentration of museum institutions; the Fulda River, once a vital thoroughfare and waterway; and the industrial area of Bettenhausen¹⁵¹. In total, 32 venues were used, amounting to more than 25,000 square meters of exhibition space¹⁵².

Mitte

C&A Façade, Obere Königsstraße 35, 34117 Kassel

documenta Halle, Du-Ry-Straße 1, 34117 Kassel

Frankfurter Straße/Fünffensterstraße (Underpass), 34117 Kassel

Fridericianum, Friedrichsplatz 18, 34117 Kassel

Friedrichsplatz, 34117 Kassel

Gloria-Kino, Friedrich-Ebert-Straße 3, 34117 Kassel

Grimmwelt Kassel, Weinbergstraße 21, 34117 Kassel

Hessisches Landesmuseum, Brüder-Grimm-Platz 5, 34117 Kassel

Hotel Hessenland, Obere Königsstraße 2, 34117 Kassel

KAZimKuba, Rainer-Dierichs-Platz 1, 34117 Kassel

Museum for Sepulchral Culture, Weinbergstraße 25–27, 34117 Kassel

Museum of Natural History Ottoneum, Steinweg 2, 34117 Kassel

Rainer-Dierichs-Platz, 34117 Kassel

¹⁵¹ Ibidem.

¹⁵² documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta 15*, documenta.de, n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta-fifteen>

ruruHaus, Obere Königsstraße 43, 34117 Kassel

Stadtmuseum Kassel, Ständeplatz 16, 34117 Kassel

WH22, Werner-Hilpert-Straße 22, 34117 Kassel

Fulda

Bootsverleih Ahoi, Blücherstraße 20/22, 34123 Kassel

Greenhouse (Karlsaue), Auedamm 18, 34121 Kassel

Hafenstraße 76, 34125 Kassel

Hiroshima-Ufer (Karlsaue), Am Auedamm, 34121 Kassel

Karlsbiese (Karlsaue), An der Karlsaue, 34121 Kassel

Compost heap (Karlsaue), Coordinates: 51.298472, 9.493083, 34121 Kassel

Rondell, Johann-Heugel-Weg, 34117 Kassel

Walter-Lübcke-Brücke, 34117 Kassel

Bettenhausen

Hallenbad Ost, Leipziger Straße 99, 34123 Kassel

Hübner areal, Agathofstraße 15, 34123 Kassel

Sandershaus / Haferkakaofabrik, Sandershäuser Str. 79, 34123 Kassel

St. Kunigundis, Leipziger Str. 145, 34123 Kassel

Platz der Deutschen Einheit (Underpass), 34125 Kassel

Nordstadt

Nordstadtpark, 34127 Kassel

ook_visitorZentrum, Weserstraße 26, 34125 Kassel

Trafohaus, Lutherstraße 2, 34117 Kassel

For a more comprehensive analysis, the Fridericianum and ruruHaus are discussed below as representative examples.

ruangrupa, the Artistic Team, and the artists conceptualized the Fridericianum space as a *lumbung*. The venue became a site of dynamic activities, intended to be experienced directly rather than consumed as static objects. Reconfigured as the FRIDSKUL (Fridericianum as School), the space served as an alternative school where the collectives explored and demonstrated various models of horizontal education grounded in everyday

life. Here, the *harvest* of shared resources, such as knowledge, stories, and experiences, was not simply stored but was continually activated and produced by artists. Thus, the notion of *lumbung* as a storage barn becomes concrete, alongside an understanding of art intrinsically connected to life.

The artist collectives involved in FRIDSKUL have convened periodically, engaging in collective decision-making also concerning the use of the rotunda, which has become the FRIDSKUL library. Viewing themselves as neighbors, they worked to host and collaborate across diverse initiatives. Among the collectives involved was Gudskul, the Indonesian collective co-founded by ruangrupa. Gudskul organized public workshops and seminars, as well as open formats of exchange, along with karaoke nights featuring other collectives¹⁵³. Through this process, the Fridericianum was transformed from a museum into a living space. The inclusion of a dormitory and a kitchen on the ground floor of the building enabled artists and project participants to cohabit, live and sleep together, share meals, and contribute to knowledge-generation processes. As a result, this created a space for encounters, whose character was continually molded by its evolving uses¹⁵⁴.

The ground floor also became home to RURUKIDS¹⁵⁵, intentionally created to enable one-to-one interactions between children and artists. The area offered a safe and stimulating environment, encouraging learning and discovery through play for babies, children, and adults alike¹⁵⁶. Open every day during the opening hours of documenta fifteen, RURUKIDS offered daily activity programs. The RURUKIDS team worked in close collaboration with documenta fifteen artists and creatives based in Kassel, curating a range of workshops and performances that invite children to learn through play, sharing, and exploration. The entire program and its facilities aimed to introduce children to various cultures worldwide by creating moments for sharing and discovery¹⁵⁷. The children's playground included a sandbox as well as a dedicated resting area.

¹⁵³ documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, cit., p.241.

¹⁵⁴ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Fridericianum as a school, Fridskul*, documenta-fifteen.de, n.d., <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/fridskul/> [Last access: May 29, 2026]

¹⁵⁵ The program was established by ruangrupa in 2010.

¹⁵⁶ documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, cit., p. 36.

¹⁵⁷ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *RURUKIDS*, documenta-fifteen.de, n.d., <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/rurukids/> [Last access: May 29, 2026]

In this context, the Romanian artist Dan Perjovschi contributed by drawing on the columns of the venue, illustrating the principal elements of the *lumbung values*. The OFF-Biennale Budapest collective from Hungary conceived a Transnational Museum of Roma Contemporary Art. Their project used art and storytelling to reveal lesser-known histories and contemporary experiences. The involvement of Roma artists from different generations resulted in an installation approach that both builds and dismantles the idea of a “RomaMoMA” — a hypothetical, transnational exhibition space.

For the physical space of ruruHaus, ruangrupa transformed a former department store (vacant since 2018) located at the corner of Treppenstrasse and Obere Königsstrasse, overlooking the Fridericianum and Friedrichsplatz in Kassel’s city center. This is the starting point for its *lumbung* practice, to enhance visibility and to facilitate inclusion into the surrounding ecosystem. Before the exhibition opening, the building already exhibited a vibrant atmosphere, with ongoing conversations, online meetings, and shared cooking. With ruruHaus¹⁵⁸, local *ekosistems* are brought into dialogue, facilitating the sharing of resources as well as the exchange of artistic and sociocultural initiatives. The statement “The ruruHaus is the living room of documenta fifteen”¹⁵⁹ offers insight into the internal dynamics of this informal space. The name itself — a neologism created from the Indonesian “ruru” for space and the German “haus” for house — further underscoring its hybrid identity, once again emphasizes the juxtaposition of art and life. It was conceived as a meeting place where visitors could familiarize themselves with ruangrupa’s working methods and its understanding of art. The space was open and welcoming, inviting everyone to participate and practice *nongkrong*, while also encouraging opportunities for gatherings with workshops, symposia, or discussions. The space also accommodated a welcome area, a café, and an arena. Additionally, the documenta ticket office and two bookshops were situated within this venue. A review of the event program on the ruruHaus website immediately reveals a remarkable diversity of activities, both in terms of content and practice. The themes reflect the values of the *lumbung*, articulated through various social and relational issues. The practices involve an intersection of languages and methods, at times requiring the active participation of visitors, while at other times adopting more passive forms of engagement.

¹⁵⁸ See the *Glossary* in Appendix A.

¹⁵⁹ documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, cit., p. 231.

Particularly illustrative in this regard are the following examples:

[HYPER SITUATIONS] *Circle Dance*, a dance workshop and ritual in which the audience is explicitly invited to step into the circle and participate collectively in the creation of rhythm, trust, and relationships.

K W 35 *Screening Day* presents a selection of short films about the artist Joseph Beuys, alongside the film “Last Angel of History” by the Black Audio Film Collective, which serves as an introduction to the topic of Afrofuturism and the social issues that emerge from the film’s context.

2.3 Economy.

Through the *lumbung* concept, ruangrupa aspired to develop an economic system where art contributes directly to social change, strengthening the bond between creative practice and activism.

documenta fifteen was financed through a combination of public funding sources, with primary support from the German Federal Cultural Foundation (Kulturstiftung des Bundes)¹⁶⁰, recognized for its key role in promoting cultural initiatives and projects in all artistic fields across the country. Additionally, important contributions were provided by the regional government of the State of Hesse and the host city of Kassel¹⁶¹.

Building on ruangrupa’s longstanding practice of need-based allocation of funds and resources, the collective developed a model intended to achieve the greatest possible equity. They referred to this model as *gado-gado*, drawing inspiration from the Indonesian dish known for combining “a bit of everything”¹⁶², thereby expressing a commitment to diversity and inclusivity in their approach.

Each *lumbung inter-lokal* member received a production budget of 180,000 euros, alongside an upfront payment of 25,000 euros in *seed money*. The *seed money* was intended as both recognition of the years of work undertaken by the artists within their

¹⁶⁰ The German Federal Cultural Foundation is funded by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media upon the resolution of the German Bundestag.

¹⁶¹ documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, cit., p 276.

¹⁶² Ivi, p. 21.

local contexts and a formal commitment to collaboratively translate these practices to Kassel in 2022. This process of translation aimed to be (re)generative, supporting the continuation of work beyond documenta fifteen. The collectives could manage *seed money* with complete autonomy, even using it to pay rent or purchase land in their respective home countries in order to stabilize their livelihood projects. The artists were provided with equal amounts of 60,000 euros for production, supplemented by 10,000 euros in *seed money* for collectives, and 5,000 euros for individuals. This funding model was the result of extensive discussions between the Artistic Team and the documenta gGmbH. Initial conversations centered on allocating a portion of the available budget as a basic income or to address the fundamental needs of all participating artists. Subsequently, ruangrupa conceived the idea of creating a "common pot," with 20,000 euros per group to be collectively managed. This approach permitted artists to decide independently on the most effective use of these resources within the exhibition, thereby reinforcing the ethos of collaboration and autonomy in collective decision-making, central to the *lumbung* process¹⁶³.

Within this process, *majelises* served as crucial spaces for the building of the documenta economy. Since June 2020, the fourteen *lumbung inter-lokal* members engaged in discussions on constructing both the exhibition and a sustainable *lumbung* economy extending beyond documenta fifteen — initially through biweekly *majelises* involving all members. The majority of collectives within the *lumbung inter-lokal* come from contexts in which the state has failed to provide adequate infrastructure and support systems for art and culture. Consequently, issues of economic survival and autonomy have been central. Out of continuing discussions about the meaning of sustainability, as well as various experiments with alternative currencies and circular economy models, an economy working group was established. This group engaged economists in dedicated work sessions and developed a range of proposals and mechanisms.

As a result of these dialogues, several working groups were created, constituting the core of the *lumbung* economy. *lumbung* Gallery, *lumbung* Kios, *lumbung* Currency and *lumbung* Land were entrusted with addressing matters of common necessity, conducting practical experiments with different strategies for achieving sustainability and exploring cultural

¹⁶³ Ibidem.

issues through economic initiatives. A key focus was also the preservation of the *lumbung* pot as a long-term resource following documenta fifteen¹⁶⁴.

lumbung Gallery operates as a collectively governed, non-speculative, and regenerative gallery model, seeking to reconfigure conventional art economies into a more commons-oriented framework aligned with *lumbung values*. In earlier editions of documenta, most of the artworks exhibited were sold backstage by gallerists during the hundred days of the exhibition and later delivered to collectors. ruangrupa chose to move these activities to the forefront, thereby foregrounding questions of economy, ownership, labor, and exchange as a matter of cultural concerns, while simultaneously seeking to secure resources for the *lumbung members*. Beyond serving as a gallery, it acted as a tool and educational program enabling comparable initiatives around the globe. Artworks by the *lumbung members* and *lumbung artists* were displayed at ruruHaus during and after the 100 days of documenta fifteen and were additionally available online thank to a collaboration with the non-profit art platform *TheArtists*. Pricing prioritized collective's basic needs and the artists' basic income, production costs, and other material condition variables, rather than speculative market estimates. The gallery also encouraged non-monetary exchange and ensured affordable artworks. Managed by the lumbung Gallery working group and *TheArtists*, it is registered as a "Verein" and was intended to continue existing beyond documenta fifteen¹⁶⁵.

lumbung Kios is a network of decentralized, self-managed kiosks (with Kios meaning kiosk in Indonesian), created to sell products throughout diverse locations. Its objective was to develop a sustainable model for generating income through the sale of goods produced by the *lumbung members*, *lumbung artists*, and their local *ekosistems*. By decentralizing distribution and endorsing sustainable economic alternatives, lumbung Kios was committed to minimizing the environmental footprint. The project draws inspiration from the Feral Trade model, formulated by the artist Kate Rich as a slow trade mechanism for product distribution. In this system, goods are transported according to the personal travel routes of individuals, thereby utilizing existing mobility networks.

¹⁶⁴ Ivi, p. 27.

¹⁶⁵ E-flux, *lumbung economy at documenta fifteen*,

<https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/467572/lumbung-economy-at-documenta-fifteen> [Last access: 3 June, 2026]

Profits generated through lumbung Kios were intended to support long-term projects and ongoing collaborations among the *lumbung ekosistem*, such as further learning sessions on sustainable distribution. A portion of these profits was allocated into a collective pot for *lumbung artists* and *lumbung members* to share resources equitably. During documenta fifteen, two physical lumbung Kios were located at ruruHaus and at Hübner areal venue, alongside a network of local shop partners throughout the city of Kassel, complemented by an online catalogue available on *lumbung.space*. Following documenta fifteen, lumbung Kios continues as a network of small Kios located all over the world¹⁶⁶.

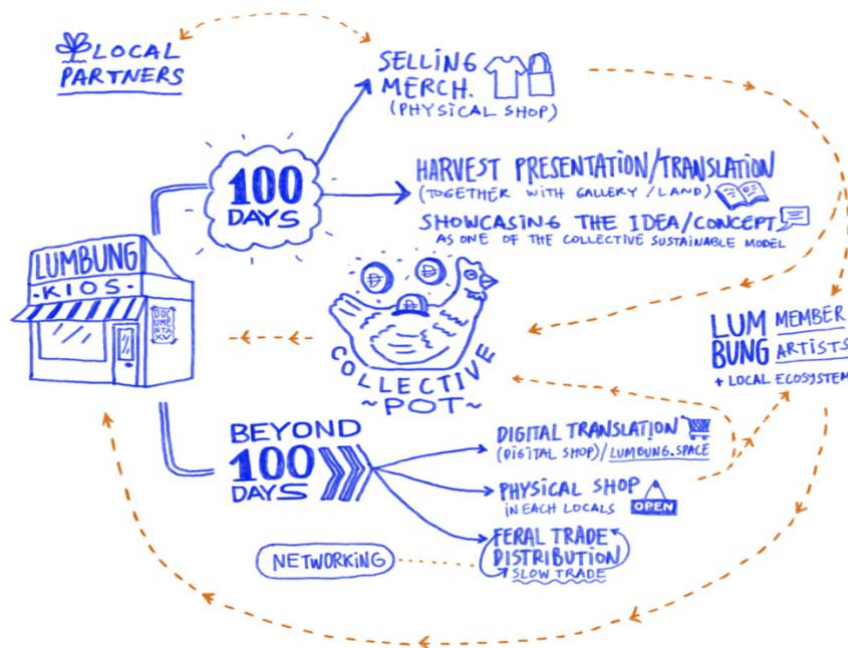


Figure 3. documenta fifteen: lumbung Kios, Harvest von Angga Cipta, 2022

Source: documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, Working group, lumbung Kios, documenta-fifteen.de, n.d., <https://documenta-fifteen.de/lumbung-kios/>

lumbung Currency endeavored to consolidate and connect the various community currencies built by four *lumbung members*: the BeeCoin (ZK/U—Center for Art and Urbanistics), the Cheesecoin (INLAND), the Dayra (The Question of Funding), and the Temu Jalar (Gudskul)¹⁶⁷.

¹⁶⁶ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *lumbung Kios and lumbung Gallery: models of lumbung economy*, Press Release, Kassel, June 9, 2022.

¹⁶⁷ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *BeeCoin, Cheesecoin, Dayra and Jalar: lumbung currency at documenta fifteen*, Press Release, Kassel, August 18, 2022.

The implementation of these community currencies had the potential to facilitate the creation of an independent economic exchange system within the *lumbung*, in which value was determined by the community itself, and exchanges were based on actual needs and common values. Several learning sessions have been dedicated to exploring the existing currency initiatives among the *lumbung members*. The development processes of these community currencies were partially presented within the exhibition in Kassel. After documenta fifteen, and the further evolution of these currencies, the *lumbung* sought to interconnect them, to enable value exchange between local communities that bypassed the traditional bureaucratic financial system. With these sustainable economic models, the working group *lumbung Currency* intended to continue and be effective beyond the 100 days of documenta fifteen¹⁶⁸.

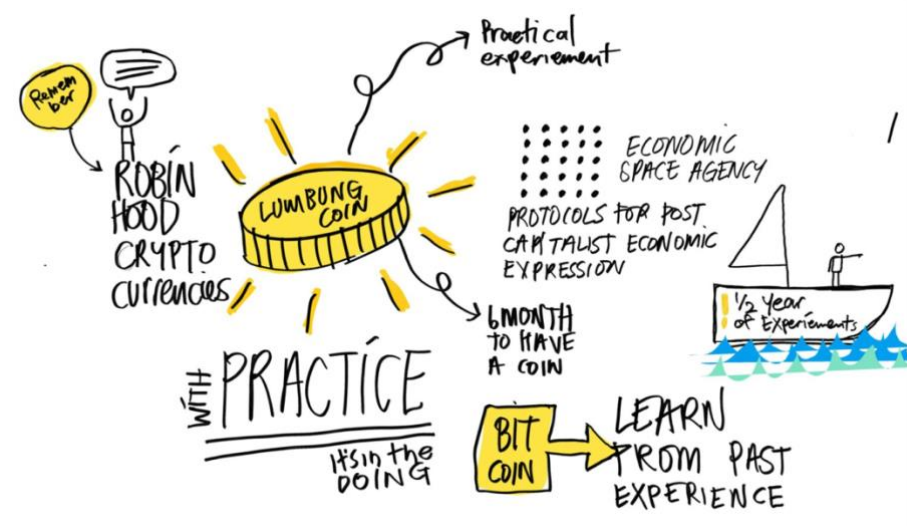


Figure 4. documenta fifteen: *lumbung Coin*, harvest by Abdul Dude, 2021

Source: documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, Working group, *lumbung Currency*, documenta-fifteen.de, n.d., <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-currency/>

lumbung land played a key role in the *lumbung* economy as it provided a space where communities could collectively manage resources and establish economies grounded in *lumbung values*. This working group investigated holistic, regenerative, and community-governed models of land development that integrate cultural, agricultural, and ecological dimensions. This represented a collaboration among *lumbung members* and *lumbung*

¹⁶⁸ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, Working group, *lumbung Currency*, documenta-fifteen.de, n.d., <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-currency/> [Last access: May 29, 2026]

artists, including INLAND, Jatiwangi art Factory, LE 18, La Intermundial Holobiente, MADEYOULOOK, Marwa Arsanios, Subversive Film, Serigrafistas queer, Wajukuu Art Project, and others. In addition, the group was devising methods for collective “investment” in specific land development projects initiated by members, with returns and value being defined collectively. In November 2022, members convened in South Africa at a post-documenta event organized by lumbung artist MADEYOULOOK to reflect on the learnings from documenta fifteen and to plan subsequent collaborations¹⁶⁹.

During the first months of 2022, all the working groups reached concrete decisions regarding the use of their respective common pot budgets. Some artists opted to reallocate these funds to their production budgets, primarily to include additional collaborators from their *ekosistems* in Kassel or to provide support within their local contexts.

This continuous exchange of resources, combined with collaborative practices and the cultivation of long-term relationships, allowed *lumbung* to respond to emerging needs, giving rise to an art economy centered on principles of collectivity and care.

Thus, *lumbung* offers a direct challenge to traditional hierarchies and market-driven approaches that typically define major art exhibitions.

2.4 Sustainability and accessibility.

“Sustainability at documenta fifteen begins with a question: In light of the alarming consequences of climate change worldwide, how can a globally oriented art exhibition that attracts visitors from all over the world and lasts 100 days be less harmful to the environment and at the same time economically and socially fair? And in the process, how can it not only do justice to the artistic directorship’s concept based on resource sharing and participation, but also carry out its responsibility as a multiplier?”¹⁷⁰.

¹⁶⁹ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Working group, lumbung Land*, documenta-fifteen.de, n.d., <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-land/> [Last access: May 29, 2026]

¹⁷⁰ documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, cit., p. 267.

Given these interrogatives, the present paragraph seeks to examine documenta fifteen by employing the frameworks of sustainability and accessibility, both of which seem to permeate the exhibition's foundational process and realization (Figure 5) and are gaining prominence in both artistic and institutional contexts.

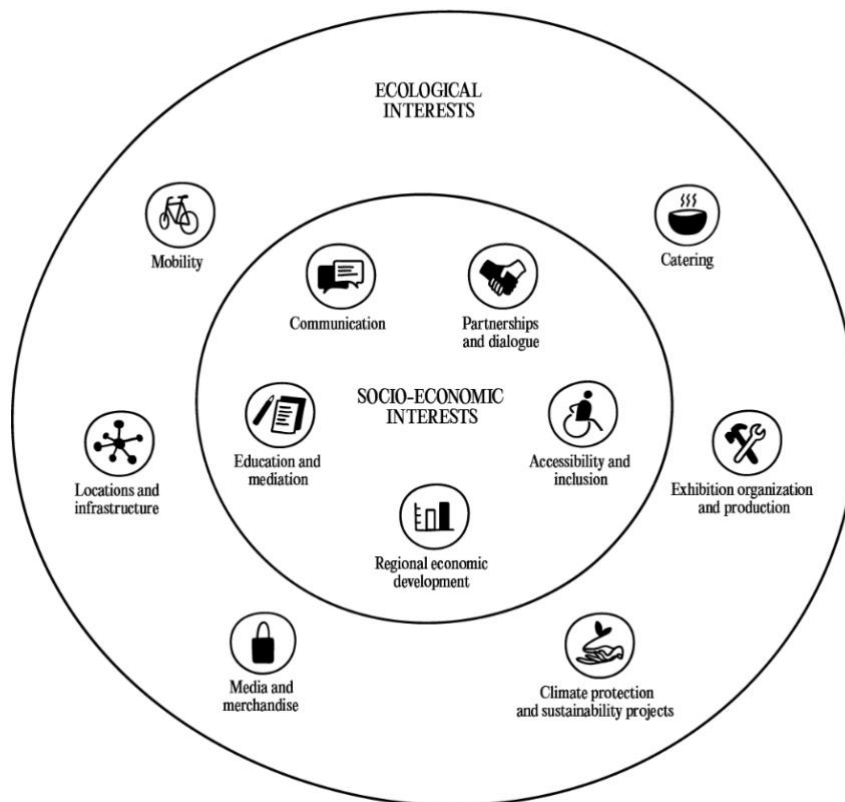


Figure 5. A diagram illustrating that the theme of sustainability is approached holistically at documenta fifteen, permeating all aspects of exhibition planning and implementation.

Source: documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Sustainability*, documenta-fifteen.de, n.d., <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/sustainability/>

In recent years, the debate surrounding cultural organizations has seen a profound shift in the international regulatory and definitional framework, establishing an indissoluble link between the public function of these institutions and their ability to establish themselves as spaces that are truly equitable and attentive to their own ecosystem.

In this landscape, a fundamental rethinking of the audience's role is also clearly emerging, where the focus has shifted radically from simply increasing visitor numbers to the quality of inclusion. A methodological study commissioned by the European Commission and dedicated to audience development has highlighted how the traditional reactive and

passive view — typical of cultural democratization policies that regarded people as mere consumers of cultural offerings — is now entirely inadequate for building active citizenship¹⁷¹.

This prescriptive approach has gradually given way to a strategic model centered on true audience development, which aims to bring about a fundamental paradigm shift, transforming people from mere “users” into true “participants.” Within this evolving framework, the strategies of cultural organizations are increasingly focused on integrating co-creation, promoting projects that are strongly grounded in participation and that, consequently, generate systemic and lasting organizational and institutional impacts¹⁷².

The intersection of public participation, the removal of barriers, and the holistic impact on the ecosystem is definitively enshrined on a global scale through the guidelines of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This global action plan explicitly envisions the integration of social, economic, and environmental dimensions as the only path leading to a prosperous and peaceful future, emphasizing the need to adopt creative approaches capable of breaking down traditional and narrow sectoral silos¹⁷³. Through the development of the *Culture/2030* framework of thematic indicators, the dimension known as *Inclusion and Participation* has been formalized as one of the four key pillars for measuring sustainability. In this context, accessibility to cultural life, artistic freedom, and the facilitation of broad, cross-sectoral decision-making processes are not simply cultural goals, but rather a cross-cutting tool capable of promoting the effective and impartial involvement of communities, promoting respect for human rights, and guaranteeing the genuine social inclusion of all minorities and professionals in the sector.

The concept of audience development has evolved substantially in both theory and practice, assuming a central role in the strategies of major cultural organizations and contemporary art exhibitions. As highlighted at the European level, audience development is by no means limited to a mere quantitative increase in visitor numbers from a marketing

¹⁷¹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Study on audience development — How to place audiences at the centre of cultural organisations: Final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2017, pp. 53, 75.

¹⁷² Ivi, p. 16.

¹⁷³ UNESCO, *Thematic Indicators for Culture in the 2030 Agenda, Culture/2030 Indicators*, UNESCO Publishing, Digital library, 2019, pp. 12, 26, 69, 92.

perspective, but rather constitutes a strategic, dynamic, and interactive process intended at making the arts widely accessible, while promoting deep and lasting community engagement. This approach denotes a definitive move from traditional one-way policies of cultural democratization toward models that emphasize inclusion, diversity, and the transformation of the public from passive consumers to active participants¹⁷⁴.

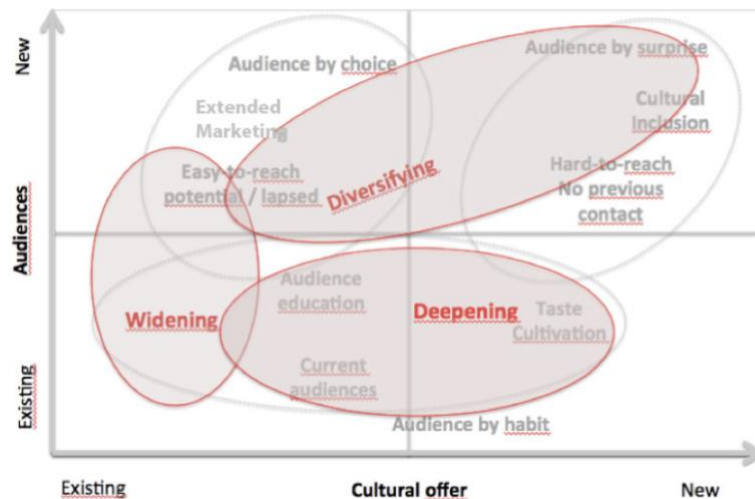


Figure 6. Strategic Model of Audience Development.

The diagram illustrates the relationship between the institutional objectives of widening, deepening, and diversifying, and the different audience types reached (by habit, by choice, by surprise).

Source: European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Study on audience development — How to place audiences at the centre of cultural organisations: Final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2017, p. 14

Within this paradigm shift, the theorization of participatory practices is systematically articulated in the work of Nina Simon, who classifies museum projects into four main categories: contributory, collaborative, co-creative, and hosted. Co-creative projects stand out clearly because they require community members to work in close synergy with museum staff from the very beginning, sharing decision-making power to define objectives and develop programs rooted in the community's actual interests¹⁷⁵.

¹⁷⁴ European Commission, cit., pp. 54, 55.

¹⁷⁵ Simon N., Atkins, J. R., *The Participatory Museum*, Museum 2.0, 2010, p. 263.

This push toward horizontality finds its most radical application in the curatorial model proposed by the ruangrupa collective for documenta fifteen. Through the concept of *ekosistem* and the adoption of the values of the *lumbung*, the exhibition in Kassel was transformed into a true experiment in communal living and co-creation on a large scale¹⁷⁶. The exhibition spaces, far removed from the traditional model of representation, were reconfigured as interactive environments. Particularly emblematic was the installation of the above-mentioned Gudskul area within the Fridericianum Museum, designed not for the contemplation of objects, but as a gathering place where artists and the public interacted directly, co-producing knowledge and the event itself through collaborative practice¹⁷⁷.

However, the rhetoric of participatory art and its wide application in major biennials are not immune to critical and conceptual friction. According to the art historian Claire Bishop, there is a problematic tension between the pursuit of autonomous aesthetic quality and the imperative of social inclusion, cautioning against the risk of evaluating artistic projects exclusively on their ethical impact. From this perspective, the lack of an adequate critical vocabulary for analyzing the dimensions of co-authorship has led to a reductive interpretive framework, dominated by moral indignation against the exclusivity of elitist art and a marked propensity to praise each collaborative process. The principal risk of this approach consists in overlooking the disruptive, paradoxical, and alienating potential of the aesthetic experience, thereby reducing art to a mere means for social betterment or a vehicle for building a pacified democratic consensus that flattens and neutralizes the real tensions within society¹⁷⁸.

This ambivalent dynamic of consensus-building unequivocally reveals the political nature of exhibition institutions, as analyzed by Oliver Marchart. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, Marchart describes biennials and major periodic art events not as

¹⁷⁶ You M., *ruangrupa a sustainable model for documenta fifteen, and after*, Ocula Magazine, 25 May, 2022, <https://ocula.com/magazine/conversations/ruangrupa-sustainability-and-documenta-fifteen/> [Last access: May 2, 2026]

¹⁷⁷ Kolb, R., Richter, D. (Eds.), *documenta fifteen — Aspects of commoning in curatorial and artistic practices*, ON Curating, Issue 54, November 2022, p. 209.

¹⁷⁸ Bishop C., *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, Verso Books, 2012, pp. 9, 275-276.

inert containers, but as full-fledged “hegemonic machines”: apparatuses where dominant culture is reproduced or, conversely, challenged and redefined. In the bourgeois-style museum, institutional practices condition the visitor into an attitude of detachment and silent contemplation (a process of “self-naturalization”), obscuring historical power relations and delegating to the public the tacit function of validating the status quo. In sharp contrast to this model, the radical decentralization from the Eurocentric canon and the practices of commoning implemented by documenta fifteen constitute a profoundly subversive act. The event’s infrastructure transformed the role of the public: from that of an isolated spectator consumer — called upon to legitimize the aesthetic hegemony of an elite — the visitor is called upon to actively participate within an anti-hegemonic, collective, relational architecture¹⁷⁹.

Focusing more specifically on accessibility, it is essential to move beyond the traditional paradigm of inclusion, which is still intrinsically connected to the medical model of disability. On the contrary, by embracing the social model, it becomes evident that it is the external barriers and the hostile cultural, social, and architectural environments encountered daily that play a predominant role. To dismantle this ableist bias, cultural institutions must recognize that visitors’ needs fall along a multidimensional spectrum of accessibility (Museum Accessibility Spectrum), on which each person occupies a different position based on multiple intersectional factors—physical, sensory, cognitive, and cultural. Consequently, accessibility can no longer be viewed as a mere regulatory retroactive adjustment or an afterthought intended to fill a physical gap but must embody the principles of Universal Design and inclusive design from the very earliest stages. The methodological approach of inclusive design requires considering all dimensions of human diversity at the outset of the process, rather than attempting to address individual abilities or disabilities separately¹⁸⁰. The implementation of these principles results in holistic benefits for the entire exhibition ecosystem: strategies designed to break down barriers for a specific group — such as interaction with tactile displays or the use of

¹⁷⁹ Marchart O., *Hegemony Machines documenta X to fifteen and the Politics of Biennialization*, OnCurating.org & Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, 2022, pp. 25-26, 82, 91.

¹⁸⁰ Eardley A. F., Jones V. E. (Eds.), *The Museum Accessibility Spectrum: Re-imagining Access and Inclusion*. Routledge., 2024, pp.11, 14.

assistive technologies — ultimately enrich the sensory experience and learning for the entire audience¹⁸¹.

In this context, documenta fifteen served as a platform for the practical implementation of these initiatives, putting in place targeted measures to remove barriers at multiple levels. The event's infrastructure incorporated low-barrier solutions right from the start, beginning with communication, by implementing a website with simplified (easy-to-read) language and a high-contrast visual design, accompanied by accessible physical routes and "break rooms" designed for sensory decompression. In terms of direct mediation, to transform visitors into active and informed participants, guided tours have been introduced in German Sign Language (DGS), in International Sign, and in simplified language, accompanied by explorations featuring multisensory descriptive content, in order to ensure experiential equity and dismantle the dominant visual centrism in art exhibitions. "Many Kasseler [...] expressed that this was one of the most accessible and relatable editions of documenta they had experienced."¹⁸² A central and innovative element of this strategy at documenta fifteen was the deliberate inclusion of neurodiverse communities, exemplified by the participation of the Project Art Works collective as a *lumbung member*. As already noted, this group, operating at the intersection of art and social work, harnesses creative potential to raise awareness of neurodiversity and empower individuals to shape the forces that impact their lives. By organizing "encounter workshops", the collective facilitated direct encounters between neurodivergent groups and institutional staff. On these occasions, staff members found themselves to be the "most vulnerable" part, having to learn how to relate to people who communicate in unconventional ways. This reversal of power dynamics proved to be a powerful tool for raising awareness, fostering deep empathy and actively deconstructing the clinical biases that still hinder genuine human connections within exhibition spaces¹⁸³.

The question of who the audience is for a major global exhibition finds an answer in documenta fifteen through a radical decolonial lens, capable of dismantling the Eurocentric perspective that has historically dominated the art world. The strategy

¹⁸¹ Vaz R., Freitas D., Coelho, A., *Blind and visually impaired visitors' experiences in museums: Increasing accessibility through assistive technologies*, The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum, Volume 13, Issue 2, 2020, p. 65.

¹⁸² Appendix B. *A conversation with Bellina Erby*.

¹⁸³ Kolb R., Richter D. (Eds.), *cit.*, p.233.

implemented by the ruangrupa collective has brought about a decentralization of cultural infrastructure, replacing the top-down and universal vision of the West with a system of “concentric circles” based on cascading invitations, whose purpose is to connect local networks without presuming to view the planet from a privileged vantage point¹⁸⁴. In this way, the traditional tension between the international art audience — often elitist and driven by the logic of cultural consumption — and the local audience in the city of Kassel is reconfigured through the concept of *ekosistem*. The exhibition ceases to be a mere showcase and becomes a space where experiences stemming from profoundly different social, economic, and cultural backgrounds come together to experiment with and learn hybrid and interdependent community strategies¹⁸⁵.

To bridge the gap between this complex global network and local communities, the exhibition focused on an educational and mediating dimension, viewed as a primary tool for inclusion. The approach adopted transformed the exhibition spaces into true environments for shared learning. It is possible, in this case, to refer once again to the example of the Gudskul inside the Fridericianum, conceived not as an exhibition space but as a “contact zone” dedicated to co-learning and direct collaboration between artists and visitors.

The introduction of the practice of commoning into curating has a disruptive impact on the visitor’s experience, deconstructing the very idea of the public as an isolated entity. Acting in open contrast to the Enlightenment tradition of the “modern autonomous individual” and challenging bourgeois concepts of authorship and authority, the infrastructure of documenta fifteen invites the public to perceive itself as part of a collective relational architecture¹⁸⁶. The public is no longer treated as a passive recipient to whom art must be explained in a top-down manner but is recognized as a bearer of situated knowledges. The visitor is thus integrated into a logic of resource redistribution, becoming a potential actor within a vast ecosystem of sharing and anti-hegemonic solidarity¹⁸⁷.

¹⁸⁴ Marchart O., *cit.*, p. 55.

¹⁸⁵ You M., *cit.*

¹⁸⁶ Kolb R., Richter D. (Eds.), *cit.*, pp. 62-62, 64, 67-71.

¹⁸⁷ Marchart O., *cit.*, p.55.

Growing awareness of the global climate crisis has necessitated a radical rethinking of the ecological responsibility borne by cultural institutions, transforming sustainability from a peripheral management option into a genuine ethical and structural imperative. In this context, Robert R. Janes' analysis urgently highlights how museums and large exhibition organizations can no longer avoid a critical examination of their own ecological footprint, as they must necessarily move beyond an anachronistic approach focused on mere consumption or architectural expansion to assume the weighty role of proactive stewards of the biosphere and defenders of indivisible common goods¹⁸⁸. This theoretical framework finds full and consistent resonance in the contemporary museological debate, exemplified by the special issue dedicated to climate action edited by Davis, which underscores the urgent need to implement *climate literacy* strategies, promote energy efficiency, and apply rigorous methodologies of operational greening within institutional practices¹⁸⁹. Actively responding to this environmental urgency, documenta fifteen has implemented a profound procedural shift, integrating the principles of respect for ecosystems and carbon emission reduction directly into the curatorial genesis of the event. The ruangrupa collective conceived the exhibition not as a temporary, extractive apparatus, but rather as a circular model in which material sustainability is interdependent with sociocultural responsibility toward the local community¹⁹⁰. This holistic approach, centered on productive upcycling, has translated into the adoption of concrete and comprehensive measures to make the entire organizational infrastructure more environmentally friendly. On the logistical front, for example, the decision was made to use paper certified by the Blue Angel eco-label, entrusting the work to a local printer and a bookbinder located within a 150-km radius, in order to drastically reduce the environmental impact resulting from long transport routes. Furthermore, green mobility has been established as a cornerstone of accessibility to the exhibition thanks to targeted partnerships—such as the e-mobility cooperation agreement signed with Volkswagen AG and the agreements with Kasseler Verkehrs-Gesellschaft AG—and through the strategic inclusion of public transportation directly in the exhibition admission ticket. At the same time, the use of regional green energy has provided clean power to key gathering places

¹⁸⁸ Janes R. R., *Museums in a Troubled World: Renewal, Irrelevance, or Collapse?*, Routledge, 2009, p. 54.

¹⁸⁹ Davis J., *Special issue: Museums and climate action. Museum Management and Curatorship*, 35(6), 2020, pp. 584, 585.

¹⁹⁰ You, M., *cit.*

such as the *ruruHaus* and *Friedrichsplatz*, spaces where, moreover, an entirely eco-friendly catering service with low environmental impact was guaranteed. Finally, the philosophy of zero-kilometer sourcing and ecological stewardship has pervasively extended even to the design of sustainable merchandise, characterized by thoughtful choices such as the sale of craft beer from the nearby *Hütt-Brauerei* in *Baunatal*, the provision of certified organic confetti, and the production of seats and cushions made from virgin wool sourced from the local *Habbishaw* workshop in *Rückersfeld*. This complex reengineering of the exhibition dynamics attests to the event's pioneering commitment to translating ecological awareness into a curatorial architecture that is structurally rooted in and respectful of its environment.

The implementation of sustainable practices within contemporary cultural organizations goes beyond mere ecological management, necessarily extending to the development of economic and social models capable of generating a tangible and lasting impact on communities. From this perspective, *documenta fifteen* represented a radical experiment in institutional reengineering, replacing the classic capitalist logics of accumulation, competition, and exploitation with a curatorial paradigm based on the circular economy and relational care. The conceptual and operational cornerstone of this transformation was the *lumbung*, with its traditional reference to *harvest* for the benefit of the entire community. Applied to the infrastructure of a global art exhibition, this principle upended the traditional top-down system of artistic commissions: financial resources were not allocated in a top-down manner, but rather channeled into a collective pot managed horizontally by the participants to support long-term practices, equitably redistributing grants based on the actual needs of the groups involved¹⁹¹.

The profound economic restructuring carried out by the *ruangrupa* collective was achieved through a decentralization of budgets aimed at ensuring the operational independence of individual organizations. In an effort to counter the extractive and speculative dynamics typical of the art market, alternative exchange models were introduced, such as the *lumbung Kios* and the *lumbung Gallery*, whose pricing logic was based not on the fetishistic value of the artwork but on ensuring a basic income for artists and covering material costs¹⁹². Also, the experimentation with autonomous community

¹⁹¹ Ibidem.

¹⁹² Kolb R., Richter D. (Eds.), *cit.*, pp. 64-65.

currencies — such as BeeCoin, Cheesecoin, Dayra, and Jalar — represented a groundbreaking development with their intent to create complementary economies capable of making cultural producers less dependent on the rigid constraints imposed by traditional funding agencies¹⁹³.

In terms of territorial impact and social sustainability, the infrastructure of the exhibition intentionally interconnected its complex global network with the civic fabric of the host city, consolidating the so-called *Kassel ekosistem*. The event was conceived not as a platform that cannibalizes urban resources for the fleeting duration of one hundred days, but as an organism capable of delivering tangible benefits. An emblematic example of this policy of redistributing attention and wealth can be seen in the decision to use *Asphalt* — a social street magazine¹⁹⁴ — as the preferred communication channel for the official announcement of the list of participating artists. This move made it possible to redirect the massive media visibility inherent in the festival toward a social project on the margins, generating unprecedented financial revenue for the magazine and demonstrating how art can concretely translate into practices of sharing and solidarity¹⁹⁵.

According to a holistic and contemporary organizational approach, the integration of sustainability within a cultural structure cannot be limited to the application of temporary measures or short-term tactics but requires a deep-rooted transformation and a process of continuous learning. In fact, the most resilient organizations are those capable of behaving like living organisms: developing a high degree of sensitivity to the needs of their surrounding environment and adopting “active adaptive management” that enables learning through direct experimentation and tolerance for structural change¹⁹⁶.

When applying this paradigm to major periodic events, a critical issue emerges historically: the inherent ephemerality of events that recur every five years, with the cyclical risk of dispersing the mobilized resources once the exhibition has concluded. To counter this limitation, the stated goal of documenta fifteen was to initiate collective practices and relational architectures that could be maintained and absorbed by the host

¹⁹³ Ivi, p. 66.

¹⁹⁴ “Asphalt is the social street magazine for Hanover and Lower Saxony. People without homes or affected by poverty sell it on the street, earning their own income and providing structure to their day.” As it is written on <https://www.asphalt-magazin.de/> [Last access: June 3, 2026]

¹⁹⁵ Marchart O., *cit.*, p. 52.

¹⁹⁶ Janes R. R., *cit.*, pp. 121, 159.

city's institutional system well beyond the exhibition's 100-day run¹⁹⁷. The edition thus positioned itself as a testing ground, prompting a complex reflection on how the institution itself can internalize, at the procedural level, models based on the commons and redistribution, thereby initiating an essential learning phase to test the scalability of these processes.

In order to support this methodological approach with empirical data, the organization has launched specific initiatives aimed at monitoring the environmental and social impact of the event. Among these, of particular importance is the conduct of an online survey of visitors explicitly focused on sustainability issues, designed as a vital data-collection tool to guide strategic decisions and refine the concept of future editions in a targeted manner. At the same time, to move beyond mere rhetoric about environmental commitment, a rigorous ecological assessment of selected areas of action was conducted, demonstrating the commitment to grounding declarations of intent in objective metrics and structured operational monitoring.

This transition marks a decisive step: the institutionalization of best practices within the relevant administrative framework. The long-term learning process was not delegated solely to the temporary curators but was formally initiated by documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH in collaboration with its main institutional shareholders — namely, the State of Hesse (Land Hesse), the City of Kassel, and the Federal Cultural Foundation. Although the relationship between horizontal artistic practices and the superstructure of a limited liability company inevitably generates complexities and frictions, this anchoring represents the only vehicle for transforming demands into stable policies¹⁹⁸. Ultimately, the organizational legacy of documenta fifteen lies precisely in the interpretation of sustainability as a dynamic process that, by transcending the individual edition of the exhibition, is called upon to extend its positive effects to all of the gGmbH's ordinary activities and to shape the values and management foundations of future iterations.

¹⁹⁷ You M., *cit.*

¹⁹⁸ Kolb R., Richter D. (Eds.), *cit.*, p. 212.

Chapter III

documenta fifteen from the perspective of Organization Studies.

3.1. A general overview.

Organization Studies is an interdisciplinary field of academic inquiry that goes far beyond the traditional conception of business management. While the classical approach of business schools tends to focus on standardization, hierarchical efficiency, and profit maximization within established corporate structures, critical organizational studies examine the multiple and complex ways in which human beings come together, cooperate, and structure their social and economic lives. From this perspective, organizations are not viewed as static, universal entities, but as contingent social constructs, steeped in power relations and political choices.

To rethink organizations and fully understand the innovative scope of a complex event such as *documenta fifteen*, it is essential to draw on scholars who have challenged the notion that there is only one way to organize collective action. One of the most authoritative voices in this field is that of Martin Parker. In his radical critique of the dominant paradigm of management education, Parker highlights how traditional teaching tends to take a single model for granted, ignoring the immense variety of human practices: “Organization is the ground and consequence of human behavior, the patterning that allows us to become what we are, and what we will be.”¹⁹⁹

The author proposes moving beyond the conceptual limitations imposed by traditional business schools to embrace instead a true “school for organizing” — an approach that explores the very process of organizing even before the finished organization. In this view, the act of organizing is a widespread and multifaceted activity: “Organizing is everywhere, and it varies according to degrees of formalization, visibility, stability, and so on.”²⁰⁰

This conceptual shift is decisive: moving from “organization” as a noun to “organizing” as a verb allows us to recognize that “organization, as a verb, produces organizations, as

¹⁹⁹ Parker M., *Shut down the business school: What's wrong with management education*, Pluto Press, 2018, p. 10.

²⁰⁰ Ivi, p. 112.

nouns.”²⁰¹ When organization is understood as a continuous and evolving practice, the possibility of building alternative structures becomes clear. In analyzing the landscape of unconventional organizational forms, the literature identifies three fundamental values that stand in contrast to the purely extractive and hierarchical logics of late capitalism: “we will suggest three principles which we have been guided by —autonomy, solidarity, and responsibility.”²⁰² These three dimensions — individual and collective autonomy, solidarity within the group, and responsibility toward the community and the surrounding environment — constitute the backbone of so-called “alternative organizations.” They are not simply exceptions or marginal models, but function as social laboratories that concretely demonstrate how “human beings have organized themselves, animals, devices, symbols, and the environment in some astonishing ways.”²⁰³ It is precisely through these theoretical lenses that the curatorial and artistic ecosystem of documenta fifteen can be decoded not only as a cultural event but as a genuine experiment in large-scale alternative organization.

The shift from the organization as a rigid entity to organizing as a fluid, negotiated social process — explored by critical Organization Studies — finds one of its most fertile and unexpected fields of inquiry today in a realm seemingly distant from traditional management: contemporary art. To fully understand the trajectory of documenta fifteen, it is essential to draw on the theoretical framework developed by scholars such as Timon Beyes and Ditte Vilstrup Holm, who highlight how today’s artistic practices have become a prime laboratory in which to experiment with novel forms of organization. In their work mapping this phenomenon, the authors theorize the advent of a veritable “organizational turn” in the art world. This paradigm signifies a radical shift in which the question of organization is no longer confined to “behind the scenes” or to the administration of cultural production, but becomes the substance, the medium, and the very material of the artwork: “organization is not merely something that is required to produce and present any kind of artwork. Rather, art becomes organization itself.”²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Ibidem.

²⁰² Parker M., Cheney G., Fournier V., Land C. (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to alternative organization*, Routledge, 2014, p. 32.

²⁰³ Parker M., *cit.*, p. 131.

²⁰⁴ Beyes T., Holm D. V., *How art becomes organization: Reimagining aesthetics, sites and politics of entrepreneurship*, *Organization Studies*, 43(2), 2022, p. 228.

This progressive and marked interpenetration between aesthetics and organizational practice systematically undermines Western-style conceptions that view the artist as a solitary creative genius and the work of art as a finished, autonomous product ready for the market. On the contrary, the organizational turn described by Beyes and Holm "prioritizes 'experimental collectivity and collaboration' over '[artistic] individuality and autonomy.'"²⁰⁵ From this perspective, contemporary art becomes a prefigurative device that investigates and shapes the social sphere — a realm in which collective processes, the construction of relational infrastructures, education, and being together become the focal point of aesthetic action. The goal is no longer to add "things" to the world, but to produce situations and new community models capable of challenging the norms of late capitalism and established institutional hegemonies.

It is precisely within this fascinating theoretical convergence that the framework of documenta fifteen, under the artistic direction of the Indonesian collective ruangrupa, finds its place. The Kassel edition did not merely host and exhibit works that addressed social issues, but was itself conceived, structured, and experienced as a complex, practical, and collective investigation into the very question of organization: the event "was held together by the question of organization: of how to organize life and art."²⁰⁶ Leveraging the institution's vast resources and global stage, the curators used the platform to connect collaborative methodologies with pre-existing *ekosistems*, primarily from the so-called Global South. The radical intent was to challenge extractive logics, focusing "on destabilizing and changing entrenched forms of ownership (organization) and authorship (art)."²⁰⁷

Viewed through this academic lens, documenta fifteen can be interpreted as much more than a controversial mega-exhibition: it represents a critical performativity of "alternative organizing" staged on an international scale. By replacing competition for individual visibility with the horizontal sharing of resources, horizontal decision-making processes,

²⁰⁵ Beyes T, Holm D. V., *Rehearsing organization: Art, eutopia, pre-enactment*. Organization Studies, Advance online publication, 2025, p. 2.

²⁰⁶ Beyes T, Holm D. V., *Media review: Contemporary art as collective organizing (and its contradictions)*, Organization Studies, 44(10), 2023, p. 1552.

²⁰⁷ Ibidem.

and the cultivation of relationships (embodied in the concept of *lumbung*), the event embodied a vast array of “artistic investigations into new forms of organizing.”²⁰⁸

Within this framework of convergence between managerial critique and artistic practice, documenta fifteen emerges as a tangible prefiguration of a different socio-economic system. Beyes and Holm, in an attempt to theoretically frame this form of organizational art, move beyond the abstract concept of “utopia” to embrace that of “eutopianism,” understood as “a systematic investigation of alternative principles of organization [...], a re-formulation of the principles of social order.”²⁰⁹ Rather than merely imagining impossible worlds, the experiment curated by ruangrupa functions as a pre-enactment — that is, a dress rehearsal or an anticipated staging of alternative organizational forms that challenge hegemonic models²¹⁰. The focus of this experiment, therefore, does not lie in the production of aesthetic objects to be contemplated, but in the creation and maintenance of complex infrastructures.

This radical departure from the Western paradigm is strikingly evident in the adoption of the *lumbung* as the central pillar of the entire event. As Blagoev and Ortlieb observe, the artistic directors’ intent was to make the very processes of organizing and producing art visible to the public: “Documenta fifteen foregrounded not individual artists but art collectives and their work processes. This focus on collective processes is epitomized in the term *lumbung*.”²¹¹ Originally an Indonesian term referring to the communal granary where the surplus harvest is stored, the *lumbung* was transformed in Kassel into a full-fledged management methodology. According to Lettau and Canyürek’s analysis, it “enables an alternative economy of collectivity, shared resource building, and equitable distribution” and is intentionally designed in stark contrast to neoliberal capitalist ideology²¹².

Reading documenta fifteen through the lens of Organization Studies, therefore, means recognizing the political and structural intentionality of an art fair that has deliberately

²⁰⁸ Ibidem.

²⁰⁹ Beyes T., Holm D. V., *Rehearsing organization: Art, eutopia, pre-enactment*, cit., p.2.

²¹⁰ Ivi, p. 1.

²¹¹ Blagoev B., Ortlieb R., *Media review: Documenta fifteen*, *Organization*, 31(7), 2024, p. 1158.

²¹² Lettau M., Canyürek Ö., *Epistemological shifts, power imbalances and conflicts at documenta fifteen: Decolonial cultural policy conceptions beyond Eurocentric universalism*, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 31(2), 2025, p. 215.

rejected the traditional top-down approach typical of international mega-exhibitions. In its place, ruangrupa has established a “decentralized collective approach, which implies that there is no single authorship, but that the work is process-oriented, rather than product-oriented.”²¹³ This deconstruction of authorship and hierarchical power has paved the way for working methodologies unprecedented in the European institutional landscape.

To fully understand the scope and mechanisms of this organizational rethinking, the following sections of this chapter will break down the *ekosistem* of documenta fifteen along three fundamental analytical lines, derived from the principles of alternative Organizations Studies: the deconstruction of command through distributed leadership (Paragraph 3.2), solidarity-based economic management rooted in shared resources (Paragraph 3.3), and the dissolution of spatial and decision-making hierarchies through profound decentralization (Paragraph 3.4). Through these lenses, we will demonstrate how the *lumbung* functioned not only as a curatorial metaphor but as a concrete and radical model of alternative organizing.

3.2 Distributed leadership.

In the field of Organization Studies, the analysis of alternative organizational forms inevitably requires a deconstruction of the traditional concept of authority and command. The classical model, rooted in twentieth-century managerial theory, is based on a top-down conception in which decision-making power and strategic vision are concentrated in the hands of a single individual or a small managerial elite. In stark contrast to this paradigm, the concept of distributed leadership emerges as a fundamental theoretical pillar for understanding the internal dynamics of unconventional organizations and, specifically, the approach adopted by ruangrupa in directing documenta fifteen. As highlighted in recent systematic literature reviews, “Distributed leadership is a paradigm that shifts focus from individual leaders to collective practices, emphasizing collaboration, shared responsibilities, and the dynamic interplay between leaders, *followers*, and

²¹³ Ivi, p. 216.

context.”²¹⁴ This perspective categorically rejects the romantic and anachronistic vision of the lone hero at the top of the pyramid, recognizing instead an inescapable systemic transformation in which “the model of the singular, heroic leader is at last being replaced with leadership that is focused upon teams rather than individuals.”²¹⁵

The radically innovative aspect of the distributed perspective lies in the shift in the unit of analysis: the focus is no longer on personality traits, charisma, or the isolated actions of an individual formal leader, but rather on the practice of leadership understood as a social process. Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond strongly emphasize this epistemological shift, asserting that leadership is essentially a practice “stretched over the social and situational contexts”²¹⁶.

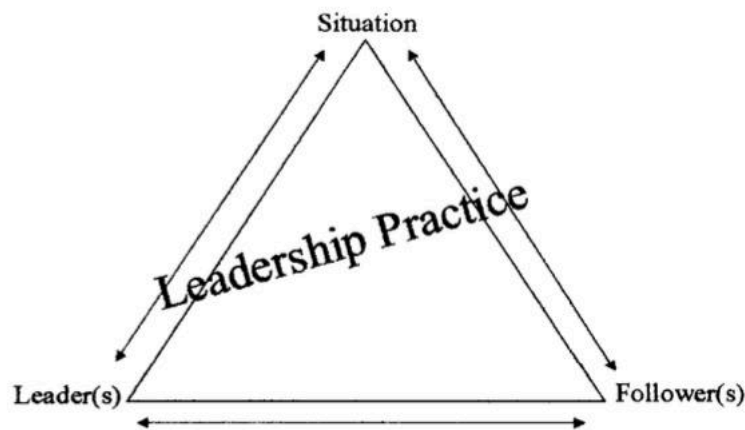


Figure 6. Constituent elements of leadership practice.

The diagram illustrates how leadership does not reside in the individual leader, but is co-constituted by the interaction among leaders, followers, and the contextual situation.

Source: Spillane J. P., Halverson R., Diamond J. B., *Towards a theory of leadership practice: A distributed perspective*, Journal of Curriculum Studies, 36(1), 2004, p. 11

²¹⁴ Zaghmout B., Harrison C., *Distributed leadership: A systematic literature review*, Strategy & Leadership, 53(3), 2025, p. 307.

²¹⁵ Harris A., Spillane J., *Distributed leadership through the looking glass*, Management in Education, 22(1), 2008, p.31.

²¹⁶ Spillane J. P., Halverson R., Diamond J. B., *Towards a theory of leadership practice: A distributed perspective*, Journal of Curriculum Studies, 36(1), 2004, p. 5.

From this perspective, leadership is not something one passively “possesses” by virtue of a hierarchical structure, but rather a widespread practice that is built on a daily basis through continuous interaction between a broad network of actors and the surrounding environment. It manifests as a complex architecture of activities in which managerial competencies are not concentrated in a single point but are distributed among multiple individuals, each of whom contributes their own wealth of knowledge and perspectives. It is, to all intents and purposes, a multiplicative rather than an additive model: the interaction between different individuals in the execution of a complex task generates a practice that surpasses, both qualitatively and quantitatively, the simple sum of individual actions²¹⁷.

However, the practical implementation and maintenance of a system of distributed leadership face significant systemic obstacles. In analyzing attempts to decentralize authority, Lee highlights the existence of deep-seated “structural and psychological forces pulling organizations toward rank-based authority.”²¹⁸ At the structural level, institutions and dominant organizational logics tend to reproduce power asymmetries, constantly pushing people to revert to forms of centralized control, which are often perceived as more reassuring or efficient for conflict resolution and coordination²¹⁹. At the psychological level, human beings are deeply conditioned by attributional biases and automatic cognitive processes that lead them to seek out — and legitimize — rank-based authority, resulting in the rapid emergence of informal hierarchies even within groups originally conceived as leaderless²²⁰. Consequently, the real challenge for alternative organizations is not merely to declare the formal absence of a hierarchy, but rather to engineer and sustain, on a daily basis, an ecosystem of collective practices capable of counteracting these powerful centripetal forces.

Despite the radical intent to dismantle hierarchical structures of authority and decision-making, it is necessary to consider a paradox well documented in the field of Organization Studies: an excessive reliance on informality. Alternative and post-bureaucratic organizations often tend to assume that vague roles and the absence of formal rules are

²¹⁷ Ivi, p.16.

²¹⁸ Lee M. Y., *Enacting decentralized authority: The practices and limits of moving beyond hierarchy*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 69(3), 2024, p. 794.

²¹⁹ Ivi, p.795.

²²⁰ Ibidem.

synonymous with freedom, flexibility, and emancipation from corporate rigidity. However, recent empirical research on decentralized organizations demonstrates the exact opposite: the absence of formal rules and clear boundaries is often an enemy, not a friend, of the decentralization of authority. In the absence of an infrastructure of codified roles, in fact, informal social hierarchies inevitably emerge and end up reproducing the very same rank-based power dynamics that the group originally sought to avoid.

To counter the powerful psychological and structural forces that physiologically drive human groups to regress toward the reestablishment of hierarchies, Lee theorizes the vital need to adopt three rigorous, interconnected organizational practices. The first is defined as “publicly codifying work roles.”²²¹ Instead of relying on vague informality, a decentralized organization must explicitly define, in a manner visible to all, the boundaries of responsibility and decision-making authority for each specific role. This formalization is not intended to create new bureaucracy, but rather to set unequivocal limits on the authority of leaders, while providing individual workers with the security and explicit autonomy to make decisions without succumbing to the habit of seeking approval from above. The second practice identified by Lee is “working from role boundaries”²²². This practice requires individuals to pay constant attention to formalized boundaries, acting strictly within their own scope of authority. This practice binds leaders to a self-discipline that curbs their natural tendency to intervene in decisions outside their strict purview and, at the same time, encourages team members to solve problems in a horizontal (peer-to-peer) manner, thereby deconstructing and circumventing the traditional hierarchical chain of command. Finally, the sustainability of decentralization is based on “relating through work roles”²²³. This is an ongoing cognitive and relational effort in which members of the organization interact and frame their respective requests not based on the personal status, influence, or informal prestige of the person making them, but exclusively in terms of the work role held at that moment. This shift serves to depersonalize authority, anchoring it to an impersonal source and mitigating the human cognitive biases that lead to legitimizing or submitting to leadership as a charismatic attribute exclusive to historical leaders.

²²¹ Lee M. Y., cit., p. 802.

²²² Ivi, p. 806.

²²³ Ivi, p. 811.

When applying this theoretical lens to the *ekosistem* of documenta fifteen, it becomes clear that the “radically collaborative, hands-off organizational approach” adopted by ruangrupa²²⁴ lacked these necessary infrastructures of codification and delimitation. By confusing the actual decentralization of power with the informal deconstruction of tasks and the programmatic absence of defined authorship (“no single authorship”)²²⁵, the *lumbung* created an organizational vulnerability, exacerbating a latent jurisdictional ambiguity. When the event was engulfed by crisis and political scandal, the absence of the three formalizing micro practices described by Lee²²⁶ left the curatorial network without solid formal safeguards for the management of authority. The lack of explicit rules regarding roles thus facilitated the rapid and drastic reinstatement of command-and-control hierarchical structures by the host institutions, confirming the theoretical assumption that radical informality paradoxically renders alternative organizations extremely fragile and vulnerable to pressures from the dominant power system.

For distributed leadership to thrive without descending into chaos or reverting to hegemonic power dynamics, a constant commitment is required to deconstruct the traditional boundaries of command. The literature indicates that this model is closely dependent on the creation of a “negotiated order” in which influence is strictly bidirectional²²⁷. In this framework, followers are not passive recipients of directives handed down from above or mere executors; rather, they become a constitutive and essential element of leadership itself, shaping organizational strategies in a horizontal manner. The decentralization of authority must therefore be understood not as a static and definitive goal, but as an unstable and continuous social process, “an ongoing and contested process”²²⁸ that requires tools for negotiation, open spaces for discourse, and a deeply rooted culture of solidarity. It is by equipping ourselves with these essential analytical categories that we can investigate the functioning of documenta fifteen, a context in which these theories have been elevated to operational practice.

In the context of documenta fifteen, the application of the paradigm of distributed leadership has taken on the characteristics of a radical dismantling of hegemonic

²²⁴ Blagoev B., Ortlieb R., *cit.*, p. 1159.

²²⁵ Lettau M., Canyürek Ö., *cit.*, p. 217.

²²⁶ Lee M. Y., *cit.*, pp. 802 – 811.

²²⁷ Spillane J. P., Halverson R., Diamond J. B., *cit.*, p. 19.

²²⁸ Lee M. Y., *cit.*, p. 793.

curatorial dynamics. In Western-style international art fairs, the figure of the curator, or artistic director, frequently mirrors that of the heroic and singular leader described by classical management theory —a figure who centralizes both decision-making power and exclusive authorship of the project's aesthetic vision. In contrast, the Indonesian collective ruangrupa has intentionally relinquished this top-down role. As Blagoev and Ortlieb observe, the entire exhibition shifted its focus to highlight not individual artists, but the processes of collective work: "Documenta fifteen foregrounded not individual artists but art collectives and their work processes."²²⁹

This shift did not amount to a mere delegation of tasks, but rather to the creation of a genuinely distributed decision-making ecosystem. Instead of managing the curation in an exclusive and centralized manner, ruangrupa acted as a catalyst within a network, extending an invitation to numerous other collectives, largely from the Global South. This approach, based on invitation and sharing, generated what has been termed an *inter-lokal lumbung* —a global network of independent organizations in which leadership was literally diffused and multiplied across multiple actors. In this unprecedented institutional ecosystem, "The entire curatorial process was organized in a bottom-up way and governed through a series of ongoing formal and informal exchanges within this network."²³⁰ The direction of the fair thus ceased to coincide with a formal, hierarchical position and became a constantly negotiated and situated practice, which systematically subordinated the expectations of the German host institutions to the needs, values, and visions of the members of the network itself.

For ruangrupa, embracing distributed leadership has meant actively attempting to neutralize those "structural and psychological forces"²³¹ that instinctively drive human groups to almost automatically reestablish chains of command based on rank and authority. One of the main strategies for implementing this profound decentralization consisted in transforming and overturning the traditional host-guest relationship. Scholars highlight how ruangrupa sought to "collectivize and decentralize decision-making," leading the institutional behemoth that is documenta to join their own artistic

²²⁹ Blagoev B., Ortlieb R., *cit.*, p. 1158.

²³⁰ Ivi, pp. 1158 – 1159.

²³¹ Lee M. Y., *cit.*, p. 794.

and prefigurative journey²³². This clear political determination not to be assimilated and neutralized by pre-existing power structures is evident in ruangrupa's explicit statement: "We refuse to be exploited by European institutional agendas that are not ours to begin with."²³³

From a strictly organizational standpoint, the move away from centralized control has blurred the clear boundaries between the leadership, the participating artists, and the complex administrative apparatus, fostering the emergence of horizontal and widespread collaborative practices. As Lettau and Canyürek point out, the direction taken in Kassel can be fully characterized as a "decentralized collective approach, which implies that there is no single authorship, but that the work is process-oriented, rather than product-oriented."²³⁴ Within this framework, authorship (and with it, organizational leadership) becomes multifaceted, plural, and constantly evolving, demonstrating empirically that decision-making power need not inevitably be exercised in a top-down manner over participants, but can be generated and managed together with them through discursive and collaborative tools.

Despite its radical theoretical premises and its success in deconstructing authorial hegemony, the practical implementation of distributed leadership within documenta fifteen generated profound friction, inevitably highlighting the limitations and structural fragilities of an organizational system lacking a hierarchical apex. As highlighted by contemporary organizational research, maintaining decentralized authority is not a static, definitive goal, but rather an unstable process that requires a continuous and immense collective effort to counteract the inescapable psychological and structural forces that draw human groups toward the restoration of hierarchies²³⁵. In complex ecosystems, the distribution of power based on specific areas of work (so-called "roles"), rather than on the traditional supervision of people, creates structural "jurisdictional ambiguity and conflict"²³⁶. When situations of uncertainty or open crisis arise, the absence of clear and unambiguous chains of command clashes with the cognitive need for reassurance and

²³² Beyes T., Holm D. V., *Media review: Contemporary art as collective organizing (and its contradictions)*, cit., p.1553.

²³³ Lettau M., Canyürek Ö., cit., p. 216

²³⁴ Ibidem.

²³⁵ Lee M. Y., cit., p. 822.

²³⁶ Ibidem.

with the presumed efficiency of directive control, often triggering a rapid regression toward the familiar logic of command-and-control.

This specific vulnerability of distributed leadership manifested itself during the scandal sparked by accusations of anti-Semitism leveled against certain works on display in Kassel (primarily the large banner *People's Justice* by the Taring Padi collective, which was removed shortly after the opening). At this moment of deep crisis, ruangrupa's network model came into direct conflict with the expectations of the public, the press, and institutional politics. According to the analysis by Blagoev and Ortlieb, the radically collaborative and non-directive approach adopted by the artistic directors produced, externally, a widespread perception of disorganization and a power vacuum: "The radically collaborative, hands-off organizational approach spearheaded by ruangrupa, it seemed, had resulted in a loss of overall curatorial control over the exhibition as a whole."²³⁷ In the eyes of the public, this lack of a single decision-maker "clashed with a public expectation that there should be someone to take responsibility for the antisemitism present at documenta fifteen."²³⁸

In a traditional organization, the formal leader takes the blame upon himself and implements centralized disciplinary mechanisms. In the *lumbung inter-lokal* of documenta fifteen, by contrast, there was no central authority capable of assigning exclusive responsibility or of imposing swift sanctions without consulting the assembly. This radical epistemological divergence only served to exacerbate and paralyze the tensions. As Lettau and Canyürek argue, the conflicts that emerged in Kassel are symptomatic of a collision between the "epistemic pluriversality" claimed by the invited collectives and the preexisting power disparities embodied by Western cultural institutions²³⁹. Faced with the inability of the horizontal network to generate a response aligned with Western protocols, the German cultural and political infrastructure reacted defensively and paternalistically, forcibly reinstating hierarchical command structures: media pressure led to the resignation of the general director; scientific investigative committees were established from above (the "Committee for Scientific Accompaniment"); and ministerial oversight measures were implemented that

²³⁷ Blagoev B., Ortlieb R., *cit.*, pp. 1159 – 1160.

²³⁸ Ivi, p. 1160.

²³⁹ Lettau M., Canyürek Ö., *cit.*, p. 218.

progressively eroded, in effect, the distributed decision-making autonomy of the artistic collective²⁴⁰.

The absence of negotiated mechanisms for rapid dispute resolution — an element that theories of commons management consider vital for the long-term survival of any horizontal structure²⁴¹ — has transformed a crisis into an irreparable systemic rupture. The experience of the Kassel fair thus serves as an invaluable case study for Organization Studies. On the one hand, it empirically demonstrates the feasibility of collaborative orchestration on a global scale capable of dismantling the managerial myth of individualistic leadership, confirming that leadership can thrive as a truly collective endeavor “stretched over the social and situational contexts”²⁴². On the other hand, however, it serves as a genuine warning, a cautionary tale for anyone who believes they can implement alternative structures while ignoring the pressures of the external context. The story, in fact, inevitably highlights “the gap between the aspirations of collectives and the reality of operating in a highly institutionalized — and, what is more, unfamiliar — environment”²⁴³.

In summary, the deconstruction of the chain of command staged by ruangrupa raises organizational questions about how alternative entities can integrate with and protect their own distributed leadership when they come up against a global socio-economic ecosystem that, on the contrary, still demands recognizable hierarchies, scapegoats, and clear cut accountability. These dynamics ultimately demonstrate that the decentralization of power does not lead to a pacification of social relations, but rather ushers in a realm of perpetual, complex, and arduous political negotiation.

The collapse of the network model during the documenta fifteen crisis offers, in this regard, a further and fundamental point of critical reflection for Organization Studies: the vital need to structure conflict. Theories of alternative organization often fall into the naivety of assuming that horizontality and the decentralization of power naturally produce harmony, pacification, and consensus. However, the literature shows that the

²⁴⁰ Ivi, pp. 221 – 223.

²⁴¹ Ostrom E., *Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 100.

²⁴² Spillane J. P., Halverson R., Diamond J. B., *cit.*, p.5.

²⁴³ Blagoev B., Ortlieb R., *cit.*, p. 1160.

elimination of formal hierarchies does not make differences disappear; on the contrary, it requires an infrastructure capable of accommodating and managing them.

To understand this structural gap in ruangrupa's model, it is necessary to adopt a perspective based on the concept of "agonism" developed by the philosopher Chantal Mouffe and taken up by critical organizational theory. As Parker and Parker point out, human and organizational relationships are intrinsically marked by inevitable tensions. In this context, it is essential to distinguish between an antagonistic approach and an agonistic one: "Agonistic confrontation is different from the antagonistic one, not because it allows for possible consensus but because the opponent is not considered an enemy to be destroyed but an adversary whose existence is perceived as legitimate."²⁴⁴ While antagonism conceives of conflict as a life-and-death struggle between enemies, agonism frames it as a continuous and democratic confrontation between adversaries who, despite radical disagreement, recognize each other's legitimacy and operate on common ground²⁴⁵.

What documenta fifteen lacked was precisely a competitive approach to managing distributed leadership. As Lettau and Canyürek point out, in the absence of a rigorous conflict-attuned approach, the deep disagreements that emerged during the event were managed exclusively through weak "informal routines," squandering the opportunity to establish genuine "cultures of conflict" within the institution²⁴⁶. The lack of institutionalized mechanisms for negotiating dissent within the *lumbung* meant that, when the anti-Semitism scandal erupted, the conflict rapidly degenerated into an antagonistic dynamic.

The severity and intractability of this organizational collapse can be explained by considering that the conflict did not revolve around mere administrative procedures, but around radically incompatible worldviews: it was a full-fledged epistemological clash. The international collectives and ruangrupa advocated for "epistemic pluriversality," that is, the right to coexist according to multiple non-Western ontologies, narratives, and forms

²⁴⁴ Mouffe C., cited in Parker S., Parker, M., *Antagonism, accommodation and agonism in Critical Management Studies: Alternative organizations as allies*, Human Relations, 70(11), 2017, 1366-1387.

²⁴⁵ Lettau M., Canyürek Ö., *cit.*, p. 223.

²⁴⁶ Ivi, p. 225.

of knowledge²⁴⁷. In contrast, the German cultural and political infrastructure operated through the lens of a rigid “Eurocentric universalism”²⁴⁸.

Faced with the crisis, the host institutions failed to recognize the collectives as legitimate political opponents with whom to negotiate on an adversarial basis. On the contrary, they reacted in a paternalistic and defensive manner, forcibly reinstating centralized forms of control through investigative committees imposed from above (the “Committee for Scientific Accompaniment”) and implementing measures of invisibilization and censorship²⁴⁹. This regression illustrates a crucial point for the study of organizational alternatives: power cannot truly be decentralized if the hegemonic host institutions retain an exclusive monopoly over which epistemologies and practices are to be considered valid. A distributed leadership capable of enduring over time requires that dissent be protected and that conflict be institutionalized in the form of a “conflictual consensus”²⁵⁰, a space in which different worldviews can clash agonistically without the intent to annihilate one another.

3.3 Shared Resources.

Moving beyond the hierarchical paradigm and centralized leadership — as analyzed in the previous section — is inextricably linked to a radical renegotiation of the mechanisms for the appropriation, management, and distribution of wealth. In Organization Studies focused on alternative forms, the critique of the capitalist model centers on the rejection of the principle of exclusive private property and the maximization of individual profit, in favor of structural logics of mutualism. To understand the unprecedented economic architecture of documenta fifteen, it is therefore essential to refer to the theory of the commons, which offers a solid conceptual framework for deciphering how communities

²⁴⁷ Ivi, p. 220.

²⁴⁸ Ivi, pp. 218 – 219.

²⁴⁹ Ivi, pp. 222 – 223.

²⁵⁰ Ivi, p. 224.

can self-organize to manage shared resources without having to resort to top-down state imposition or the extractive logic of the free market.

Elinor Ostrom's pioneering work on Common-Pool Resources (CPR) has historically debunked the well-known assumption of the "tragedy of the commons," empirically demonstrating that human beings are not inexorably trapped in opportunistic dilemmas destined to culminate in the destruction of shared resources. On the contrary, she highlights how "communities of individuals have relied on institutions resembling neither the state nor the market to govern some resource systems with reasonable degrees of success over long periods of time."²⁵¹

		Subtractability of use	
		High 'rivalrous' good	Low 'non-rivalrous' good
Difficulty of excluding potential beneficiaries	High	Common-pool resources (common goods): groundwater basins, lakes, irrigation systems, fisheries, forests, etc.	Public goods: peace and security of a community, national defence, knowledge, fire protection, weather forecasts, etc.
	Low	Private goods: food, clothing, automobiles, etc.	Toll goods (club goods): theatres, private clubs, daycare centres, cable television

Figure 7. *The Commons as a Type of Goods (adapted from Ostrom).*

Classification of resources based on degrees of subtractability and excludability.

Source: Parker M., Cheney G., Fournier V., Land C. (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to alternative organization*, Routledge, 2014, p.

The success and longevity of these self-governing institutions lie in their ability to establish clear boundaries and autonomously define rules for appropriation and provision that are closely aligned with local conditions, while also ensuring that most of the individuals concerned can participate directly in modifying these decision-making

²⁵¹ Ostrom E., cit., p. 1.

rules²⁵². From this analytical perspective, collective management is not reduced to a mere utilitarian calculation but becomes a process of community governance that is continuous and finely tuned to the group's specific circumstances.

However, in the most recent and critical literature on alternative organization, the concept of the commons has been further expanded, moving beyond the mere material dimension (the physical or monetary resource itself) to embrace an intrinsically political and relational dimension. As theorized within the field of critical management, the commons embody true "social systems in which resources are shared by a community of users/producers, who also define the modes of use and production, distribution, and circulation of these resources through democratic and horizontal forms of governance."²⁵³ In this theoretical framework, Massimo De Angelis and David Harvie clarify that the commons become a realm of constant practice, using the term "commoning" (the practice of the commons) to denote the set of social relationships unmediated by the commodity form and the logic of capital —necessary to create, reproduce, and sustain the shared good itself²⁵⁴.

This specific, active, process-oriented, and negotiated understanding of shared resources — the "commoning" that transforms the noun into a verb and makes capital inseparable from the human networks that manage it — provides the theoretical keystone for interpreting the economic core introduced by ruangrupa in Kassel. In the context of a massive global art event — an institutional sector deeply steeped in neoliberal logic and dominated by extreme competition for the accumulation of funds and individual symbolic capital — the adoption of the lumbung represented not merely a poetic curatorial theme, but a large-scale experiment in alternative organizing centered on the communal management of economic capital.

When we apply the rigorous analytical categories of "commoning" to the empirical level, the edition of *documenta fifteen* reveals itself as an unprecedented and disruptive experiment in economic redistribution on a global scale. Traditionally, mega-exhibitions of contemporary art operate within a well-defined neoliberal paradigm: the vast financial

²⁵² Parker M., Cheney G., Fournier V., Land C., (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to alternative organization*, Routledge, 2014, p. 285.

²⁵³ Parker M., Cheney G., Fournier V., Land C., (Eds.), *cit.*, p. 252.

²⁵⁴ De Angelis M., Harvie D., *The commons* in Parker M., Cheney G., Fournier V., Land C., (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to alternative organization*, Routledge, 2014, p. 286.

resources derived from state funds and private sponsorships are allocated in a top-down manner to commission individual artists — often already established — to produce spectacular new works intended to fuel the global art market. The ruangrupa collective has programmatically subverted this extractive and competitive logic. Instead of encouraging the accumulation of symbolic and material capital through individual works, the artistic directors explicitly asked the participating collectives “not to bring more stuff into the world, let alone produce works for the global art market, but to bring their current practice to Kassel.”²⁵⁵

This bold curatorial choice led to a radical redesign of the fair’s financial infrastructure, culminating in the establishment of the so-called *common pot*. Instead of disbursing individual honoraria or allocating production budgets that were rigidly constrained and accounted for from above according to corporate metrics, “the art funding was ‘horizontally’ shared among the collectives — many of which were in marginal and beleaguered positions — in the form of a common pot, leaving it up to the respective groups to decide how to spend it.”²⁵⁶ This mechanism of horizontal funding embodies the literal translation of the concept of *lumbung* into a tangible, mutualistic organizational practice. The theoretical ideal of sharing was in fact concretely implemented through “a self-organized distribution of funding itself”²⁵⁷ transforming the substantial institutional resources into true commons managed autonomously by the artists’ networks.

By deconstructing traditional business models and the notion of exclusive ownership, the documenta fifteen *ekosistem* laid the operational foundations for an authentically post capitalist cultural policy. The literature highlights how the complex economic architecture of the event provided for participating collectives and artists to receive a universal basic income on a monthly basis for a period of two years, combined with an equal sum allocated for productive purposes. This economic backbone foreshadowed an equitable allocation and equal distribution of wealth capable of replacing capitalist accumulation²⁵⁸. Testimonies from the artistic direction, documented in the literature, confirm the intentionally confrontational nature of this financial rethinking in relation to hegemonic

²⁵⁵ Beyes T, Holm D. V., *Media review: Contemporary art as collective organizing (and its contradictions)*, cit., p. 1552.

²⁵⁶ Ibidem.

²⁵⁷ Beyes T, Holm D. V., *Rehearsing organization: Art, eutopia, pre-enactment*, cit., p. 6.

²⁵⁸ Lettau M., Canyürek Ö., cit., p. 220.

Western norms: the institution of documenta was in fact described as trapped “in a really capitalistic business model that requires it to produce on a large scale, for which you need a large budget, public funding, and then it becomes commercialized.”²⁵⁹ The primary intent, therefore, was to avoid compromising with such neoliberal infrastructures.

By refusing to operate according to market logic, the implementation of the *lumbung* was not limited solely to the pooling of economic capital but instead embraced a much more holistic vision. As Lettau and Canyürek point out, this framework “aims for a collaborative and sustainable model for the welfare of the community, in which resource use is not limited solely to economic means but also includes ideas, knowledge, and programs.”²⁶⁰ From this perspective, the communing experimented with in Kassel took on the characteristics of a vast and complex relational infrastructure: the shared management of the budget required participants to engage in a methodical and continuous process of negotiation, assembly-based decision-making, and active listening. The exhibition event was thus transformed into a macroscopic socio-economic laboratory in which the financial resource was organically decommodified, removed from the imperative of competition, and reconfigured as a vital common good, used to support cooperative creative ecosystems and demonstrate the organizational feasibility of a paradigm based on trust rather than hierarchy.

The practical implementation of these principles of commoning required the Indonesian art collective to navigate — and, to a large extent, challenge — the complex financial architecture that has historically underpinned the German art fair. Faced with a total public budget of 42 million euros, disbursed through an intricate multi-level administrative system involving the city of Kassel, the state of Hesse, and the Federal Foundation for Culture, ruangrupa pushed the boundaries of institutional norms by rejecting the top-down allocation of funds²⁶¹. The artistic directors, in fact, distributed 100,000 euros to each of the fourteen collectives originally invited, delegating to them full responsibility for managing and allocating this capital “through collective management and decision-making”²⁶². In this way, a form of post-capitalist cultural policy was created, based on “power-to” rather than “power-over,” in which the common good becomes a

²⁵⁹ Ibidem.

²⁶⁰ Ivi, p. 215.

²⁶¹ Lettau M., Canyürek Ö., *cit.*, p. 219.

²⁶² Ibidem.

means to trigger collective actions capable of questioning and dismantling the extractive logic of the art market²⁶³.

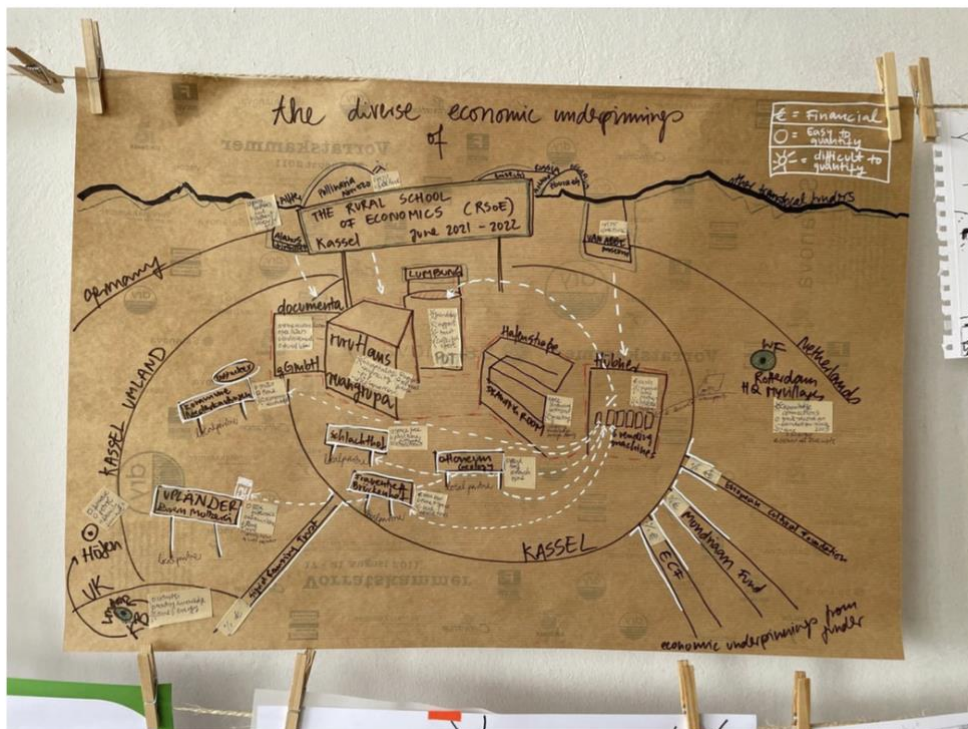


Figure 8. Mapping of local economic relationship (The Rural School of Economics).

Source: Beyes T., Holm D. V., *Rehearsing organization: Art, eutopia, pre-enactment*. Organization Studies, Advance online publication, 2025, p. 10

However, the introduction of such radical sharing practices into a Western institutional ecosystem has inevitably produced profound structural fractures. The epistemological divide between the fluid trust-based nature of the *lumbung* and German administrative hyper regulation has created a major clash. As Lettau and Canyürek observe, a clear discordance emerged between ruangrupa's horizontal practices and the institution's rigid organizational structure, bringing to light a decisive power imbalance in determining "what knowledge legitimizes the norms of cultural production and whose epistemologies dominate."²⁶⁵

The impossibility of reconciling the flexible collective responsibilities of the commons with the institutional need for precise and unambiguous chains of control and accountability (typical of European institutions) acted as a latent barrier, exacerbating the political and media tensions that erupted during the exhibition. Despite these structural challenges, the recalibration of resources implemented in Kassel remains an inescapable example for the theory of alternative organizations: it demonstrates, on a large scale, how capital can be deliberately de-privatized to finance mutual aid networks, reminding the field of Organization Studies that "the ability to instigate social change relies on the possibility of redistributing the sensible"²⁶⁶.

3.4 Decentralization.

The deconstruction of hierarchical command and the mutualistic recalibration of resources analyzed in the previous sections cannot fully realize their transformative potential without a simultaneous and profound reexamination of the physical dimension in which collective action takes shape. Within the Organization Studies, critical literature has progressively highlighted how organizing is never a purely abstract or incorporeal process, but rather a phenomenon that is intimately and inevitably spatial. To contextualize this dynamic, it is essential to refer to the so-called "spatial turn" that has swept through the social and organizational sciences, undermining the traditional

²⁶⁵ Lettau M., Canyürek Ö., *cit.*, p. 219.

²⁶⁶ Beyes T., Holm D. V., *How art becomes organization: Reimagining aesthetics, sites and politics of entrepreneurship*, *cit.*, p. 238.

assumption that the physical environment is merely an inert container or a passive backdrop for human decisions. Drawing in particular on Henri Lefebvre's theory of space, scholars such as Beyes and Steyaert emphasize that space must be conceptualized as a social product in constant flux and, at the same time, as a generative force capable of shaping, enabling, or prohibiting specific interactions: social relations, in fact, have no real existence except "in and through space. Their underpinning is spatial."²⁶⁷

For alternative organizations, which programmatically aim to subvert the "market managerial hegemony"²⁶⁸, it is therefore essential to deconstruct not only the chains of command, but also the rigid and centralized spatial architecture typical of the corporate model. Instead of closed boundaries and functional compartmentalization aimed at control and extractive efficiency, alternative organizational forms experiment with dynamics of spacing. With this non representational term, Beyes and Steyaert refer to the material, affective, and embodied process through which organizational space is continuously staged and negotiated "through the cultivation of atmospheres [...] and the modulation and engineering of affect"²⁶⁹. Spatial experimentation thus becomes a fundamental political vector: while late capitalism seeks to co-opt expressive energies through the design of flexible spaces to maximize profit, it is precisely through a novel spatiality that "new forms of organizing and new political imaginations"²⁷⁰ unfold.

In this context, spatial decentralization emerges as a concrete organizational response to the homogenizing pressures of dominant institutions. As Mair and Rathert point out in their analysis of socially oriented economic action, the emergence of bottom-up organizational practices, deeply rooted in the local context, often responds to a widespread and profound disenchantment with globalized markets or institutions "that lack participatory structures and are unable to meet local needs."²⁷¹ Repositioning organizational activity — both physically and conceptually — at a decentralized level means, in this sense, bringing decision-making power closer to the communities in

²⁶⁷ Lefebvre H., cited in Beyes T., Steyaert C., *Spacing organization: Non-representational theory and performing organizational space*, Organization, 19(1), 2012, p. 48.

²⁶⁸ Parker M., *cit.*, p. 136.

²⁶⁹ Beyes T., Steyaert C., *cit.*, p. 55.

²⁷⁰ Ibidem.

²⁷¹ Mair J., Rathert N., *Alternative organizing with social purpose: Revisiting institutional analysis of market-based activity*, Socio-Economic Review, 19(2), 2021, p. 820.

question, dismantling the idea of an omniscient central authority in favor of a multiplicity of interconnected nodes.

The intersection between the organizational theory of spacing and the contemporary art scene has made this need for decentralization even more explicit. Unconventional art often operates outside canonical institutional boundaries, carrying out genuine “unsitings” to intervene in ordinary spaces and create friction with capitalist aesthetics²⁷².



Figure 9. Richard Bell's installation "Western Art" at the Fridericianum (2022).

Provocatively positioned near the stairs leading to the restrooms in the basement, the work is a literal example of spatial “unsiting” that mocks the aesthetics and institutional hierarchies of the Western art gallery.

Source: Blagoev B., Ortlieb R., *Media review: Documenta fifteen*, Organization, 31(7), 2024, p. 1158

²⁷² Beyes T., Holm D. V., *Rehearsing organization: Art, eutopia, pre-enactment, cit.*, p.17.

This prefigurative approach rejects structural gigantism and excessive centralization, embracing instead a policy of fragmentation based on micro-spaces or diffuse networks that generate an organizational atmosphere in perpetual transition. In heavily regulated contexts such as those of major Western art fairs, institutional hegemony is traditionally expressed precisely through the centralized control of exhibition spaces and visitor routes. Decentralizing in such an environment means dismantling the epicenter of curatorial control, transforming the event into a constellation of horizontal workshops and informal spaces intrinsically devoted to “in-betweenness”²⁷³. It is starting from this sophisticated conceptual framework, in which anti-hierarchy becomes concrete geography, that it is possible to decode the radical spatial infrastructure implemented by ruangrupa to redefine the *ekosistem* of documenta fifteen.

The practical application of the theories of spacing and unsiting within documenta fifteen manifested itself first and foremost through a radical reconfiguration of the exhibition’s geography. Rejecting the traditional concentration of curatorial power in a single monumental hub, the ruangrupa collective structured the event around a deliberately fragmented layout, described in the literature as a “disjointed topography”²⁷⁴. By distributing the installations and workshops across “32 venues spread out over the city”²⁷⁵, the artistic direction defused the idea of a hegemonic and omniscient center, compelling the public to move through Kassel’s peripheral urban fabric, abandoned industrial sites, and transit spaces, thereby activating a decentralized network in which the act of organizing could permeate the entire urban environment.

The most emblematic and politically charged spatial intervention in this deconstruction, however, concerned the very heart of the institution: the Fridericianum Museum. Built during the Neoclassical period, it has historically stood as “one of Europe’s first public art museums”²⁷⁶, a temple dedicated to Western aesthetics, to the rigid separation between artwork and viewer, and to the celebration of individual genius. Driven by the *lumbung*, this imposing institutional container underwent a profound process of internal unsiting, being stripped of its purely contemplative and extractive function. As Lettau and Canyürek

²⁷³ Blagoev B., Ortlieb R., *Media review: Documenta fifteen, cit.*, p. 18.

²⁷⁴ Beyes T., Holm D. V., *Media review: Contemporary art as collective organizing (and its contradictions), cit.*, p. 1552.

²⁷⁵ Ivi, p. 1551.

²⁷⁶ Blagoev B., Ortlieb R., *Media review: Documenta fifteen, cit.*, p. 1157.

point out, the museum has been converted into a Fridskul (a school), serving as a “repository for shared resources, such as knowledge, stories, and experiences”²⁷⁷. The reconfiguration went so far as to physically accommodate the domestic lives of the participants: some areas became dormitories for the artistic team, while the creation of the so-called Godkitchen transformed the austere museum halls into “a place where visitors and artists cooked and interacted together.”²⁷⁸ At the same time, the Tunisian collective El Warcha repurposed other spaces in the Fridericianum, turning them into a “workshop for participatory design”²⁷⁹. The museum, as a spatial apparatus of power, was thus occupied and reprogrammed as a place of life, action, and collective sustenance.

In addition to deconsecrating the apex of the architectural hierarchy, documenta fifteen generated new, flexible social epicenters. The ruruHaus, for example, was not conceived as a mere showcase gallery, but was strategically positioned as “a living room in the city of Kassel, where visitors and people could come together apart from meeting on the streets.”²⁸⁰ To ensure that decentralization was not reduced to a mere logistical relocation, it was necessary for these spaces to accommodate and encourage the collective’s specific relational methodology, namely, the practice of *nongkrong*. As observed by field researchers, this practice required dedicated architecture, which took the form of “often makeshift and ramshackle but cozy structures: pavilions built of wood, trailers, mosquito nets, straw, and secondhand clothes” and the creation of “gardens, residencies, and resting rooms, a sauna, a half-pipe, and a club.”²⁸¹

²⁷⁷ Lettau M., Canyürek Ö., *cit.*, p. 216.

²⁷⁸ Ivi, pp. 216 – 217.

²⁷⁹ Beyes T., Holm D. V., *Rehearsing organization: Art, eutopia, pre-enactment, cit.*, p. 12.

²⁸⁰ Lettau M., Canyürek Ö., *cit.*, p. 217.

²⁸¹ Beyes T., Holm D. V., *Rehearsing organization: Art, eutopia, pre-enactment, cit.*, p. 10.



Figure 10. A potential gathering space set up at the Hübner-Areal (2022).

The inclusion of informal structures disrupts the hierarchical architecture of the Western art gallery, reconfiguring the organizational space.

Source: Beyes T., Holm D. V., *Rehearsing organization: Art, eutopia, pre-enactment*, Organization Studies. Advance online publication, 2025, p. 12.

By replacing the white cube (the typical neutral and sterile space of Western galleries) with these informal, material interventions, ruangrupa has forged a complex “atmosphere of in-betweenness”²⁸². The exhibition spaces, redesigned in this way, no longer imposed rigid pathways aimed at the rapid consumption of the works, but instead encouraged visitors to slow down, linger, and participate in the construction of the event itself. This diffuse and permeable spatialization made it possible to physically recalibrate the fair, transforming it into “a space for a host of collective practices of organizing in the form of

²⁸² Ivi, p. 11.

craft making, partying, workshops, and discussion forums, or just hanging out.”²⁸³ In short, by dismantling the top-down architecture of the exhibition, documenta fifteen showcased the embodied plurality of alternative organizations, materially demonstrating how an ecosystem without a spatial apex or a single center of gravity can nonetheless sustain and nurture complex and productive human connections.

The introduction of a fluid, non-hierarchical spatiality within a cultural institution that is historically and economically regulated did not, however, take place without generating significant friction. The experiment in physical and relational decentralization promoted by ruangrupa has highlighted a profound structural incompatibility between the informal practices of spacing and the logics of control rooted in the host institutional landscape. Abandoning top-down surveillance of exhibition spaces and pathways meant, for the artistic directors, intentionally renouncing the predictability typical of major Western events. As Beyes and Holm observe, this radical openness to situational multiplicity demonstrates that the “atmospheric performativity” characteristic of alternative organizations does not automatically guarantee peaceful or emancipatory outcomes, but may, on the contrary, leave them vulnerable to “atmospheric breakdowns and discursive incriminations”²⁸⁴. The openness and informality of the thirty-two decentralized venues — in the absence of preemptive, centralized curatorial screening — have in fact become the primary target of criticism as the event has been engulfed by the scandal triggered by accusations of anti-Semitism. In this context of profound crisis, the dispersed structure of documenta fifteen came into direct conflict with the demands for accountability put forward by German politicians and public opinion. Deprived of a single institutional center of gravity and clear authoritative boundaries, the curatorial approach may have appeared to outsiders as a negligent and chaotic loss of control. Blagoev and Ortlieb emphasize how the systemic refusal to designate a single decision-maker positioned at the apex of the spatial and organizational structure “clashed with a public expectation that there should be someone to take responsibility”²⁸⁵.

Faced with this destabilization, the Western institutional ecosystem reacted by attempting to restore the original boundaries and hierarchies. In their study of the conflicts that

²⁸³ Beyes T., Holm D. V., *Media review: Contemporary art as collective organizing (and its contradictions)*, cit., p. 1552.

²⁸⁴ Beyes T., Holm D. V., *Rehearsing organization: Art, eutopia, pre-enactment*, cit., p. 18.

²⁸⁵ Blagoev B., Ortlieb R., *cit.*, p. 1160.

emerged in Kassel, Lettau and Canyürek highlight how the bureaucratic apparatus and political decision makers gradually adopted a defensive and “paternalistic” stance, effectively bypassing the horizontal, assembly-based networks of the *lumbung* to implement direct and final interventions in the exhibition space, which took the form of actions of “de-installation, invisibilization, and contextualization”²⁸⁶. This reaction materially documents the self-defense mechanism through which hegemonic power structures tend to neutralize anomalies and forcibly reabsorb unconventional practices, authoritatively reaffirming the priority of their own epistemologies²⁸⁷.

The entire organizational structure of documenta fifteen ultimately presents itself as an unavoidable case study for Organization Studies, capable of synthesizing both the prefigurative power and the intrinsic vulnerabilities of alternative organizing. The three themes analyzed in this third chapter — the deconstruction of command through distributed leadership (3.2), the de-commodification of the budget through communal management of funds, or “commoning” (3.3), and the dismantling of physical hierarchy through a spatial practice of radical decentralization (3.4) — unequivocally demonstrate that the construction of alternative architectures on a large scale is an empirically feasible undertaking. However, the controversial Kassel affair also serves as a stern academic warning, revealing in all its harshness “the gap between the aspirations of collectives and the reality of operating in a highly institutionalized — and, what is more, unfamiliar — environment”²⁸⁸. It confirms, in conclusion, that the organizational transition beyond the corporate pyramid is never a peaceful or definitive milestone, but a perpetually unstable ecosystem, forced to confront, renegotiate, and defend itself every day against the inevitable “structural and psychological forces pulling organizations toward rank-based authority.”²⁸⁹

As highlighted in recent critical literature, the exploration of organizational forms at documenta fifteen was not limited to the practices of diagramming (relational and economic mapping) and *nongkrong* (gathering in informal spaces) but also encompassed additional operational modalities that are fundamental to the prefiguration of social

²⁸⁶ Lettau M., Canyürek Ö., *cit.*, p. 223.

²⁸⁷ Ivi, p. 219.

²⁸⁸ Blagoev B., Ortlieb R., *cit.*, p. 1160.

²⁸⁹ Lee M. Y., *cit.*, p. 794.

alternatives: infrastructuring and archiving²⁹⁰. Infrastructuring, in particular, manifests as a “para-institutional” organizational tactic that appropriates the resources and physical infrastructures of the art world to enable new forms of concrete and cross-cutting political action²⁹¹. Through this lens, the action of collectives does not produce mere aesthetic objects, but takes the form of “remixing, translating, and reconfiguring infrastructures” to test relational and economic models independent of the market. This is a key theme that also emerged from the interview conducted personally with Bellina Erby: “In Kassel specifically, I observed how alternative art spaces became more open to what could be described as a “living room model” of hospitality, where hosting, gathering, and informal exchange are not separate from artistic production but are understood as part of it. This shift is infrastructural.”²⁹² A prime example of this spatial organizational practice is provided by the Tunisian collective El Warcha (which means “the workshop” in Arabic), which transformed an entire hall of the Fridericianum into a veritable workshop for participatory design. Using simple, standard wooden chairs and metal structures, the collective engineered and assembled towers and suspension bridges, dismantling the static solemnity of the museum space through a practical, horizontal, and low-cost approach²⁹³. From a global critical perspective, infrastructure becomes a tool for exposing and subverting the organizational logic and supply chains of late capitalism. The installation *Return to Sender* by the Nairobi-based collective The Nest Collective is a striking example of this: situated in Karlsau Park, the monumental work consisted of enormous bales of electronic waste and secondhand clothing exported from Europe to Africa. This reconfiguration of infrastructural waste exposes the supposed benevolence of Western charity, highlighting how the export of waste actually serves to allow nations in the Global North to rid themselves of their sense of guilt, while systematically ignoring the environmental damage caused by hyper-consumption and the destruction of local economic, social, and cultural ecosystems.

In parallel with the deconstruction of infrastructure, the alternative organization model at documenta fifteen utilized archiving as a systematic method for accumulating, translating, and exhibiting discordant temporalities and marginalized histories.

²⁹⁰ Beyes T, Holm D. V., *Rehearsing organization: Art, eutopia, pre-enactment, cit.*, p. 12.

²⁹¹ Ivi, p. 13.

²⁹² Appendix B. *A conversation with Bellina Erby.*

²⁹³ Ivi, p. 12.

Conceived as a living process of “harvesting” community memories and decolonizing knowledge, this form of archiving stands in stark contrast to the rigid and dusty institutional archive. In this operational context, archiving is not understood as a passive preservation of artifacts, but as an active struggle for cultural survival against dominant epistemologies: one example is the RomaMoMA collective, which, through an “archive in the making,” has demanded institutional recognition for Roma contemporary art, laying the groundwork for a future museum dedicated to²⁹⁴. Archival operations often take on the nature of political calculations and claims. On the façade of the Fridericianum, Australian artist and activist Richard Bell has installed a large, eighteen digit digital metronome designed to algorithmically calculate “the unfinished business of colonization.” The work quantified in real time the immense financial debt accumulated by the Australian government and Western powers toward Indigenous peoples. This work functions as a public and performative archive that spatializes the financial inequality rooted in colonial practices, offering a visible and inescapable measure of what Western institutions tend to omit from their organizational balance sheets. Finally, alternative archiving requires the construction of relational devices based on trust rather than transactional exchange. In an underpass in Kassel, the Black Quantum Futurism collective installed a machine resembling a science-fiction device designed to record visitors’ oral histories. This organizational device did not offer trivial, immediate feedback — typical of the interactive consumption mechanisms of the art market — but required time and dedication, asking participants to donate their stories to build a collective sound archive, with no guarantee of knowing who would receive that gift in the future²⁹⁵.

Through the lens of Organization Studies, infrastructuring and archiving demonstrate how alternative organizing must translate into ongoing material practices. Artistic collectives have carried out veritable “pre-enactments” through which new organizational possibilities are tested, assembled, and documented, countering the predatory scalability of capitalism with a logic of slow proliferation and community-based cross-pollination²⁹⁶.

²⁹⁴ Ivi, p. 14.

²⁹⁵ Ivi, p. 15.

²⁹⁶ Ivi, pp. 17 – 19, 20.

Conclusion

This thesis aims to analyze the concept of *lumbung* in its broadest interpretations and applications within the context of the fifteenth edition of documenta, which, for the first time, featured a collective — ruangrupa — as its artistic directors. In particular, it was deemed essential to adopt the perspective of Organization Studies for the analysis of this art exhibition. documenta fifteen, in fact, was not limited to the mere display of works of art but presented a genuine experiment in an alternative organizational and economic model as opposed to the rigid Western artistic and cultural system.

This work has brought several significant aspects to light. First, the historical and artistic reconstruction of the various editions of documenta has allowed for a full understanding of the institutional roots and the context within which ruangrupa's work is situated. At the same time, the historical reconstruction of the ruangrupa collective has made it possible to outline its deep engagement with Indonesia's socio-political context and the development of the principles of collectivity, solidarity, and critical discourse as a counter-response to the restrictive policies of the New Order regime. The intersection of these two realities has brought to light points of friction between a neoliberal, Western model and an informal, flexible artistic and organizational practice — an expression of a decentralized perspective. At the same time, this intersection has demonstrated both the possibility and the urgency of alternative organizational and curatorial models.

Second, the challenge faced by ruangrupa in translating the *lumbung* on a large scale into a global platform made it possible to create a deeply participatory exhibition, focused in particular on the organizational and creative process. This operational framework also resulted in a particular emphasis on sustainability, evident in the ecological choices made — both in the development of accessibility and in the development of an alternative post-capitalist economy.

The exhibition did not merely showcase works of social critique; rather, it functioned itself as a practice of institutional and social critique, presenting an ecosystem of social, environmental, and educational practices aimed at defining a new organizational and collaborative model. At the heart of this model was the shared management of the budget, which ruangrupa distributed directly to the collectives, allowing them to self-manage and fund a long-term creative process, rather than an artistic product created ad hoc for the

exhibition and destined for the traditional art circuit. This challenges the rules of the art market and the final artistic product, shifting the focus to the creative process itself — one in which artists, curators, and ultimately the audience collaborate, share resources, and build a sense of belonging and deep friendship. The *Lumbung Kios* experiments, which are still ongoing, demonstrate how collaborative practices can achieve a potential that individualistic artistic production cannot reach.

The theories of Parker, Beyes, and Ostrom provided the foundation for exploring the process of organizing and interpreting documenta fifteen as an example of an alternative organization. By bringing these theories into dialogue with the *lumbung* paradigm, it became clear that an alternative form of management is possible. In particular, the feasibility of this model was demonstrated through the key concepts of distributive leadership, shared resources, and decentralization. The creation of a network of collectives and artists — made possible through cascading invitations and horizontal cooperation — helped dismantle the top-down model and overcome the individualism of the artist. The theory of the commons provided a fundamental theoretical framework for understanding the collective use and management of the “common pot.” Furthermore, by decentralizing the exhibition venues and spreading them throughout Kassel, ruangrupa eliminated the hierarchy of spaces, making them more democratic and informal. The public was invited to actively participate and experience the works and spaces as places for gathering, learning, and discussion, thereby reclaiming them for themselves. Finally, by creating a horizontal network among collectives and artists, ruangrupa further decentralized decision-making, delegating it to the *ekosistem* and using assemblies (*majelis*) as operational forums for meeting and discussion.

It is therefore clear that documenta fifteen — when analyzed over a short period of time — possesses all the elements necessary to serve as a model for “rethinking the organization.” To this end, a *destruens* phase is necessary — aimed at dismantling concepts that have become anachronistic and entrenched in traditional Western institutions — followed by a *construens* phase, aimed at implementing novel operational processes and methodologies provided by the *lumbung* framework. When applied on a large scale, this model compels the entire art system to question its own limits and to rethink curatorship and artistic production.

While this argument demonstrates that the transition to horizontal organizational models is feasible, it also highlights some of its limitations.

First, the informal nature of the documenta fifteen network made it vulnerable, as did the absence of conflict-resolution structures. This made it difficult to engage in timely cultural mediation and formulate a shared response, leading to a rapid paternalistic reaction from Western institutions, which ultimately ended up forcibly reestablishing hierarchies and centralized controls. It therefore seems inevitable that alternative organizations will have to contend with external pressures and rigid regulatory and bureaucratic frameworks.

This is a short-term case study that began with the appointment of ruangrupa as artistic director and concluded with the successful implementation of the model during the 100-day exhibition. However, questions remain regarding the long-term sustainability of this model. While there is growing interest in these ideas, translating them into institutional practice remains extremely challenging. On the one hand, there is greater openness toward alternative art spaces based on practices of hosting, gathering, and informal exchange; on the other hand, the decentralization of power, shared decision-making processes, the collective dimension, and collaboration require ongoing dialogue, continuous negotiation, and the systematic use of collective assemblies so that these principles can be effectively cultivated and sustained over time. “If traditional art institutions are willing to invest the necessary time and energy to nurture these values, I believe meaningful transformation is possible. But still, it requires long-term dedication.”²⁹⁷ It remains to be seen whether the next edition of documenta, scheduled for 2027, will retain some elements of the *lumbung* model or whether, on the contrary, this paradigm will be completely abandoned.

Ultimately, the proposed model serves as a response to contemporary crises — not by sensationalizing them, but by adopting sustainable solutions, the circular economy, inclusion, and the building of social bonds and experimental practices designed to endure beyond the conclusion of the exhibition. However, to ensure that these experiments do not become a futile interlude within the system, a transformation of the hosting institutions is necessary.

²⁹⁷ Appendix B. *A conversation with Bellina Erby.*

Bibliography

Argan G. C., *L'Arte Moderna 1770-1970*, Sansoni, 2002

Arts Collaboratory, *History*, artscollaboratory.org, n.d.,
<https://artscollaboratory.org/history/>

Beyes T., Holm D. V., *How art becomes organization: Reimagining aesthetics, sites and politics of entrepreneurship*, *Organization Studies*, 43(2), 2022

Beyes T., Holm D. V., *Media review: Contemporary art as collective organizing (and its contradictions)*, *Organization Studies*, 44(10), 2023

Beyes T., Holm D. V., *Rehearsing organization: Art, eutopia, pre-enactment*. *Organization Studies*, Advance online publication, 2025

Bishop C., *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, Verso Books, 2012

Blagoev B., Ortlieb R., *Media review: Documenta fifteen*, *Organization*, 31(7), 2024

Bodden M., *Dynamics and Tension of LEKRA's modern national theatre 1959-1965*, 2012

Close R., *Technology, Food, Community and Art: Looking Back on This Year's OK.Video - Indonesia Media Arts Festival in Jakarta*, The Artling, November 06, 2017

Darmawan A., *Fixing the Chain of the Cycle of Ideas*, North Art Space, Jakarta, 2010

David C., *documenta X – 1997*, loisweinberg.net, n.d.,
<https://www.loisweinberger.net/en/exhibitions/documenta-x-2/>

De Angelis M., Harvie D., *The commons* in Parker M., Cheney G., Fournier V., Land C., (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to alternative organization*, Routledge, 2014

documenta, catalog, Prestel-Verlag, Munich, 1995

documenta II, *catalog*, M. Du Mont Schauberg, Cologne, 1959

documenta 8, *Catalog*, Weber & Weidemeyer GmbH & Co KG, Kassel, 1987

documenta IX, *catalog*, vol. 1, Edition Cantz, Stuttgart, 1992

documenta 12, *Catalog*, Taschen, Cologne, 2007

dOCUMENTA (13), *The Book of Books*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2012

documenta fifteen, *Handbook*, Hatje Cantz, Kassel, 2022

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *BeeCoin, Cheesecoin, Dayra and Jalar: lumbung currency at documenta fifteen*, Press Release, Kassel, August 18, 2022

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *documenta fifteen and lumbung practice*, Press kit, June 18, 2020

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *documenta fifteen presents Visual Identity*, Press Release, Kassel, December 15, 2020

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Fridericianum as a school, Fridskul*, documenta-fifteen.de, n.d., <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/fridskul/>

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Harvest. First lumbung assembly*, documenta-fifteen.de, n.d., <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/harvest-first-lumbung-assembly/>

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Lumbung*, Press kit, August 22, 2022

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *lumbung Kios and lumbung Gallery: models of lumbung economy*, Press Release, Kassel, June 9, 2022

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *ruangrupa selected as Artistic Direction of documenta fifteen*, Press Release, Kassel, February 22, 2019

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *RURUKIDS*, documenta-fifteen.de, n.d.
<https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/rurukids/>

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Working group, lumbung Currency*,
documenta-fifteen.de, n.d., <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-currency/>

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Working group, lumbung Land*,
documenta-fifteen.de, n.d., <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-land/>

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta*, documenta.de,
n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta>

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta II*,
documenta.de, n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/ii-documenta>

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta III*,
documenta.de, n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta-3>

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta 4*,
documenta.de, n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/4-documenta>

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta 7*,
documenta.de, n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta-7>

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta X*,
documenta.de, n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta-x>

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta 11*,
documenta.de, n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta11>

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta 14*,
documenta.de, n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta-14>

documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Retrospective. documenta 15*,
documenta.de, n.d., <https://documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta-fifteen>

Eardley A. F., Jones V. E. (Eds.), *The Museum Accessibility Spectrum: Re-imagining Access and Inclusion*. Routledge, 2024

E-flux, *lumbung economy at documenta fifteen*, August 23, 2022
<https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/467572/lumbung-economy-at-documenta-fifteen>

European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Study on audience development — How to place audiences at the centre of cultural organisations: Final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2017

Floyd K. M., *d is for documenta: institutional identity for a periodic exhibition*, OnCurating, Issue 33, n.d., <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-33-reader/d-is-for-documenta-institutional-identity-for-a-periodic-exhibition.html>

Gardner A., Green C., *Biennials, triennials, and documenta: the exhibitions that created contemporary art*, John Wiley & Sons, 2016

Gardner A., Green C., *Post-North? Documenta 11 and the Challenges of the “Global” Exhibition*, On Curating, Issue 33, June 2027

Goltz S., *Collective Crafting in Post-Suharto Indonesia: A Journey with Ruangrupa from the Jakarta Institute of the Arts to Documenta Fifteen in Kassel*, Duke University Press, 2022

Gross R., Bang Larsen L., Blume D., Pooth A., Voss J. (eds.), *documenta: Politics and Art*, Prestel, Munich, 2021

Gudskul, *Art Lab*, gudskul.art, n.d., <https://gudskul.art/en/artlab/>

- Guida C., Maggiolo D., Pietronave P., *Taking care of Ecosystem through the Lumbung Process and the intangible infrastructure. A Conversation with: Reza Afisina, Iswanto Hartono, and Bellina Erby (from ruangrupa and Gudskul Ecosystem, Jakarta Indonesia)*, Milan, Italy, 13 and 14 May 2023,
<https://www.roots-routes.org/taking-care-of-ecosystems-through-the-lumbung-process-and-intangible-infrastructures-a-conversation-with-reza-afisina-iswanto-hartono-and-bellina-erby-from-ruangrupa-and-gudskul-ecosystem-jakarta/>
- Harris A., Spillane J., *Distributed leadership through the looking glass*, Management in Education, 22(1), 2008
- Hujatnika A., Zainsjah A. B., *Artist Collectives in The Post-1998 Indonesia: Resurgence, or a Turn (?)*, International Conference on Aesthetics and the Sciences of Art, 2020
- Janes R. R., *Museums in a Troubled World: Renewal, Irrelevance, or Collapse?*, Routledge, 2009
- Kolb R., *documenta fifteen's Lumbung: The Bumpy Road on the Third Way: Fragmentary Thoughts on the Threats and Troubles of Commons and Commoning in Contemporary Art and Knowledge Production on documenta fifteen – aspect of commoning in curatorial and artistic practices*, ON Curating, Issue 54, November 2022
- Kolb R., Ritcher D., *documenta fifteen—Aspects of Commoning in Curatorial and Artistic Practices*, OnCurating, Issue 54, November 2022
- La contestazione della Biennale di Venezia*, Infoaut, June 18, 1968,
<https://www.infoaut.org/storia-di-classe/18-giugno-1968-la-contestazione-della-biennale-di-venezia>
- Lee M. Y., *Enacting decentralized authority: The practices and limits of moving beyond hierarchy*, Administrative Science Quarterly, 69(3), 2024

- Lefebvre H., cited in Beyes T., Steyaert C., *Spacing organization: Non-representational theory and performing organizational space*, Organization, 19(1), 2012
- Lettau M., Canyürek Ö., *Epistemological shifts, power imbalances and conflicts at documenta fifteen: Decolonial cultural policy conceptions beyond Eurocentric universalism*, International Journal of Cultural Policy, 31(2), 2025
- Mair J., Rathert N., *Alternative organizing with social purpose: Revisiting institutional analysis of market-based activity*, Socio-Economic Review, 19(2), 2021)
- Marchart O., *Hegemony Machines documenta X to fifteen and the Politics of Biennialization*, OnCurating.org & Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, 2022
- Mouffe C., cited in Parker S., Parker, M., *Antagonism, accommodation and agonism in Critical Management Studies: Alternative organizations as allies*, Human Relations, 70(11), 2017
- Neumann M., *In zweifelhafter Gesellschaft? Adolf Arndt und August-Martin Euler – Zwei vergangenheitspolitische Akteure der ersten documenta 1955*, ZFG 72, 2024
- O'Neil P., *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, United States, 2012
- Ostrom E., *Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action*, Cambridge University Press, 1990
- Parker M., *Shut down the business school: What's wrong with management education*, Pluto Press, 2018
- Parker M., Cheney G., Fournier V., Land C. (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to alternative organization*, Routledge, 2014
- RAIN, *Rain Artists' Initiatives. Info*, r-a-i-n.net, n.d., <http://www.r-a-i-n.net/info/>

Richter D., *Curatorial Commons? A Paradigm Shift on documenta fifteen – aspect of commoning in curatorial and artistic practices*, ON Curating, Issue 54, November 2022

ruangrupa, *About*, ruangrupa.org, n.d., <https://www.ruangrupa.org/en/about>

ruangrupa, Papastergiadis N., *Living Lumbung: The Shared Spaces of Art and Life. ruangrupa and Nikos Papastergiadis in Conversation*, e-flux Journal, Issue #118, May 2021

ruangrupa, *What is lumbung?*, Asphalt, No. 1, 2021

Simon N., Atkins, J. R., *The Participatory Museum*, Museum 2.0, 2010

Smith H., *"Crapumenta!" ... Anger in Athens as the blue lambs of Documenta hit town*", The Guardian, May 14, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/may/14/documenta-14-athens-german-art-extravaganza>

SONSBEEK, *Archive, Soonsbeek 2016: Transaction*, sonsbeek.org, n.d., <https://sonsbeek.org/en/archive/sonsbeek-2016-transaction>

Spillane J. P., Halverson R., Diamond J. B., *Towards a theory of leadership practice: A distributed perspective*, Journal of Curriculum Studies, 36(1), 2004

UNESCO, *Thematic Indicators for Culture in the 2030 Agenda, Culture/2030 Indicators*, UNESCO Publishing, Digital library, 2019

Universes in Universes, *documenta 11*, universes.art, n.d., 2002, <https://universes.art/en/documenta/2002>

Universes in Universes, *documenta – History, All editions of the documenta in Kassel since its beginning in 1955*, universes.art, n.d., <https://universes.art/en/documenta/history>

Universes in Universes, *lumbung*. Short concept by ruangrupa for documenta 15, universes.art, n.d., <https://universes.art/en/documenta/2022/short-concept>

Vaz R., Freitas D., Coelho, A., *Blind and visually impaired visitors' experiences in museums: Increasing accessibility through assistive technologies*, The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum, Volume 13, Issue 2, 2020

Venturi L., *documenta 5. Colloquio con Szeeman*, 1972

Yalçinkaya Can T., *Making Friends as Labour: The Political Economy of the Lumbung in Documenta Fifteen*, Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art, vol. 24, no. 1, 2024

You M., *ruangrupa a sustainable model for documenta fifteen, and after*, Ocula Magazine, 25 May, 2022, <https://ocula.com/magazine/conversations/ruangrupa-sustainability-and-documenta-fifteen/>

Zaghmout B., Harrison C., *Distributed leadership: A systematic literature review*, Strategy & Leadership, 53(3), 2025

Appendix A

Glossary.

Note: The text below is reproduced in full from the official documenta fifteen website.²⁹⁸ It is included for academic purposes only, to support the analysis developed in this study.

“Many terms from different languages, as well as familiar terms used in new contexts, make up the vocabulary of documenta fifteen.

Building social relationships and questioning power dynamics is essential to the *lumbung* practice. This also includes expanding the way language is used and understanding it as a tool to develop new ideas and perspectives. Furthermore, documenta fifteen stands for polyphony, and using terms from different languages is an integral part of that”.²⁹⁹

AOTEAROA

Aotearoa is a Māori term for the island nation of New Zealand, where the arts collective and lumbung member FAFSWAG was founded in 2013. FAFSWAG aims to challenge the lack of representation of Queer and Indigenous people in the creative industries by evading heteronormativity and establishing multicultural identities and an interdisciplinary practice.

COMMON POT

A vessel for sharing money and non-monetary resources such as skills, space, time, and energy. A shared budget to be governed collectively by a group of artists (*mini-majelis*). It is like a totem pole, something highly symbolic that holds the community together.

²⁹⁸ documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, *Glossary*, n.d.,

<https://documentafifteen.de/en/glossary/>

²⁹⁹ Ivi

DOCUMENTA COMMISSION

documenta commission is an international Advisory Board that acted as a Finding Committee for the appointment of documenta's artistic director and accompanies them in the further project process. In February 2019, ruangrupa was selected as artistic director of documenta fifteen.

EKOSISTEM

Ekosistem is the Indonesian term for ecosystem, developed in reference to, but not synonymous with, the ecological concept of ecosystem. "*Ekosistem*" or "ecosystem" describes collaborative network structures through which knowledge, resources, ideas, and programs are shared and linked.

HARVEST

Harvest means the documentation of meetings, which is prepared by harvesters as overviews, texts, sketches or drawings and enables the traceability of the meeting.

The harvesters listen and reflect. In exaggerated, humorous or poetic form, they document the process from their individual perspective and by means of their own artistic practices.

LUMBUNG

lumbung is the concrete practice of ruangrupa for documenta fifteen and beyond.

Translated from Indonesian, it means "rice barn." In Indonesian rural communities, the surplus harvest is stored in communal rice barns and distributed for the benefit of the community according to jointly defined criteria. This principle stands for the living and working practice of ruangrupa and is used for an interdisciplinary and collaborative work on artistic projects.

LUMBUNG ARTISTS

lumbung artists are artists and collectives invited by ruangrupa and the Artistic Team to realize contributions for documenta fifteen following the *lumbung* practice. In close cooperation with ruangrupa, the Artistic Team and the 14 *lumbung members* they create an interdisciplinary platform of contemporary art.

To this end, the *lumbung* artists are organized into groups, so-called *mini majelis* in which they exchange ideas and support each other. They develop concrete works for documenta fifteen while the contributions from the *lumbung members* remain a permanent part of the *lumbung inter-local* network.

Just like the *lumbung members*, the *lumbung artists* invite further participants to join them in creating their artistic works for documenta fifteen in Kassel.

LUMBUNG CALLING

lumbung calling is the first event format of the documenta fifteen accompanying program, called *Meydan*. The series of talks with different guests is dedicated to *lumbung-values* and will take place every first Saturday of the month from April to October 2021 and can be followed live on documenta fifteen's YouTube channel.

LUMBUNG INTER-LOKAL

lumbung inter-lokal refers to the international network of *lumbung members*. The term *inter-lokal* describes the interweaving of their local practices as well as their international distribution through the network.

LUMBUNG KONTEKS

lumbung konteks is a seven-part series of online conversations taking place once every month from December 2021 until June 2022.

Each session invites two documenta fifteen *lumbung members* to introduce their practices and wider ecosystems and to expand and reflect on each other's work. Through sharing stories, songs, and tools for living and working in community, *lumbung members* discuss the differences and affinities between their specific contexts. *lumbung konteks* addresses the importance of the localities within which we all work, the conditions that inform and ground our practices, and the ways we can learn from each other's models of education, ecology, and economy.

LUMBUNG MEMBERS

lumbung members are community-oriented collectives, organizations and institutions invited by ruangrupa and the Artistic Team to further develop the idea and practice of *lumbung*. Together they form an interdisciplinary platform of contemporary art that

will have an impact beyond the 2022 exhibition. The international network of the 14 *lumbung members* is referred to as the *lumbung inter-lokal*.

Beyond the joint collaboration on fundamental ideas and issues related to documenta fifteen, the *lumbung members* – just like the *lumbung artists* – present their own projects within the exhibition. They also invite further participants to join them in creating their artistic works. The contributions from the *lumbung members* remain a permanent part of the *lumbung inter-lokal* network while the *lumbung artists* develop concrete works for documenta fifteen in Kassel.

LUMBUNG VALUES

lumbung values are the basic principles of *lumbung* and of the practice of *lumbung members*. These include generosity, humor, local anchoring, independence, regeneration, transparency and frugality.

MAJELIS

majelis is a term for a gathering or meeting. In person or digitally, regular *majelis* are an important tool of the *lumbung* network to exchange ideas and projects. *mini-majelis* are smaller gatherings, while *majelis akbar* (mega majelis) is a larger gathering between *lumbung members*, *lumbung artists* and other participants of documenta fifteen.

MEYDAN

Meydan in Urdu, Ukrainian, Fārsi, and Arabic refers to an accessible common space in a city, such as a square or public park, where people come together.

After the Opening Week of documenta fifteen, from June 18 to June 25, 2022, the three Meydan Weekends happen on July 8–10, August 12–14, and September 9–11, 2022. The program was developed together with the Kassel *ekosistem*.

NONGKRONG

nongkrong is an Indonesian slang term from Jakarta and means “hanging out together”. Casual conversation and togetherness, but also the sharing of time, ideas or food are anchored in this term. For *ruangrupa*, but also for the *majelis* of the *lumbung members*, *nongkrong* is an important practice.

RUANGRUPA

ruangrupa is the Artistic Direction of documenta fifteen. Founded in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 2000, the collective's work is based on a holistic social, spatial, and personal practice strongly connected to Indonesian culture, in which friendship, solidarity, sustainability, and community are central.

"ruangrupa" translated freely means "art space" or "spatial form."

RURUHAUS

ruruHaus is a neologism composed of the Indonesian "ruru" (=space) and the German word "Haus" (=house).

ruruHaus, a former sports arena in downtown Kassel, is part of ruangrupa's curatorial practice and provides spaces for collective practice, ideas, exchange and collaborations. In addition, the space is intended to function as the city's centrally located living room, inviting creative gathering and lingering (*nongkrong*).

SOBAT

lambung is based on friendship. In Indonesian *sobat* means friend or companion. The plural form is *sobat-sobat*.

As friends, the art mediators *sobat-sobat* accompany visitors on guided tours through the documenta fifteen exhibition. These exhibition tours are called Walks and Stories and form part of *lambung* knowledge. As an active part of *lambung* knowledge visitors and art mediators alike create encounters and access through their practice of storytelling.

TRANSLATION

Translation is a poetic way of bringing a project already existing in touch with more potential users. An alternative logic to commissioning.

lambung members and artists were asked to keep doing what they are doing while translating their practice to Kassel and back.

WARUNG KOPI

warung kopi is a street café in Indonesia which organically provides services as social interaction centers. As warm and cozy social spaces, *warung kopis* are open for everyone to find company, talk, write, read, entertain each other, or waste time. Different people come together there. They drink coffee, discuss different topics, and exchange ideas. The focus is on communication with each other.

warung kopi is also a documenta fifteen format to host casual conversations in a relaxed setting with and between journalists and members of the Artistic Team, *lumbung members*, and other people involved.

Appendix B

A conversation with Bellina Erby.

B.E.: Thank you for your willingness to learn more about documenta fifteen.

The reflections I share come from my own perspective as a member of the Gudskul ecosystem, a former Artistic Director Assistant for documenta fifteen, someone who has been living with the spirit of lumbung for more than a decade, and, importantly, as someone who continues to live in Kassel, Germany, and remains actively engaged with its artistic landscape.

What concrete legacies do you believe documenta fifteen has left on the international artistic landscape? From the perspective of the audience, do you think that this exhibition has, in some way, impacted the way these large-scale exhibitions are viewed and experienced?

B.E.: One of the most concrete legacies of documenta fifteen is the visible growth of collective practices, particularly in Kassel and within its broader artistic ecosystem. After the exhibition, many local audiences and institutions became more familiar with forms of artistic practice that place friendship and everyday sociality at their core.

In Kassel specifically, I observed how alternative art spaces became more open to what could be described as a “living room model” of hospitality, where hosting, gathering, and informal exchange are not separate from artistic production but are understood as part of it. This shift is infrastructural.

From the perspective of audiences, I would also argue that documenta fifteen has influenced how large-scale exhibitions are perceived and experienced. Many Kasseler I spoke to, both during and after the documenta fifteen, expressed that this was one of the most accessible and relatable editions of documenta they had experienced. Even at the first public press conference for documenta sixteen, during the Q&A session, several questions began with remarks stating that documenta fifteen had been the most meaningful iteration for them. I still hear similar reflections til today, where people describe being deeply moved by how ruangrupa and the lumbung ecosystem engaged with Kassel in such a grounded and relational way.

Part of this perception comes from the curatorial approach of ruangrupa itself, which emerged from a grassroots collective context. Prior to the official opening of documenta

fifteen, members of ruangrupa were already present in Kassel, attending local events, spending time in public spaces, and engaging informally with different communities. During the event, they were not distant or inaccessible figures. They are on the streets, in bars, and often at under-spotlighted local events.

This mode of presence reshaped the relationship between the institution and its publics. It made the exhibition like something embedded in the social fabric of the city. In that sense, documenta fifteen shifted the expectations of what a large-scale exhibition can be, and how close it can come to everyday life and lived experience.

Were ruangrupa actually able to create an interdisciplinary platform that remained effective beyond the 100 days of documenta fifteen? After the conclusion of the 100 days, are there any structures that continue to operate?

By way of conclusion, a reflection. It has now been four years since documenta fifteen, and the world today differs significantly from that of 2022, shaped by a series of increasingly urgent crises. In your opinion, are traditional art institutions currently ready to welcome and implement models grounded in the horizontal distribution of resources, shared decision-making processes, and relational care as pathways toward sustainable alternatives?

B.E.: In my view, most traditional art institutions are not yet fully ready to embrace and implement models grounded in the horizontal distribution of resources, shared decision-making, and relational care. While there is growing interest in these ideas, translating them into institutional practice remains extremely challenging.

This challenge becomes even more complex when we consider the social, political, and economic conditions of the past four years, which have increasingly shifted toward conservative tendencies across many parts of the world, including Indonesia, the place where lumbung values are rooted. In such a climate, institutions often become more risk-averse, more bureaucratic, and more concerned with maintaining existing structures than experimenting with alternative ways of organizing.

As a member of Gudskul Ecosystem, someone who worked closely with documenta fifteen, and who continues to live in Kassel, Germany, I have experienced firsthand how difficult it is to apply these principles within art ecosystems that are closely intertwined with the state, particularly institutions that operate with public funding. In these contexts, political pressures, administrative structures, and questions of accountability can significantly

limit the possibility of implementing genuinely horizontal and collective modes of working.

At the same time, I have witnessed the continuous growth of alternative art institutions and collectives that are committed to horizontal decision-making and collective practices. New collectives continue to emerge, experimenting with different ways of organizing and sharing resources. In this regard, I believe that documenta fifteen played an important role in demonstrating to the global art world that collective practice is not merely an idealistic proposition, but a viable and tangible way of working.

What is often overlooked is that the lumbung did not end with documenta fifteen. The network of the fourteen lumbung members, together with many artists and collectives involved in documenta fifteen, remains connected and active today. lumbung has continued to evolve as a living ecosystem sustained through long-term relationships, resource-sharing, and mutual support.

Since 2024, Lumbung Practice has also been established as a Master's programme at the Sandberg Instituut in Amsterdam, developed in collaboration with GUDSKUL and de Appel. Just recently, the programme celebrated the graduation of its first cohort of MA students. This development suggests that lumbung is increasingly being recognized as a pedagogical framework.

Similarly, Lumbung Kios remains active today and can be found at Casco Art Institute in Utrecht, continuing its exploration of alternative economic models.

Of course, no collective or institution will ever fully achieve perfectly horizontal resource distribution, completely shared decision-making, or ideal forms of relational care. These are ongoing processes. However, moving toward these goals requires a set of fundamental values: transparency, generosity, local anchoring, regeneration, sufficiency, a desire for independence, and perhaps most importantly, humor.

If traditional art institutions are willing to invest the necessary time and energy to nurture these values, I believe meaningful transformation is possible. But still, It requires long-term dedication.

Dichiarazione del ricorso a strumenti di Intelligenza Artificiale (IA)

La sottoscritta Aurora Di Iusto, matricola numero 976937, iscritta presso Ca' Foscari al corso di Laurea magistrale in Economia e Gestione delle Arti e delle attività culturali (EGArt), autrice dell'elaborato finale/tesi di laurea *Rethinking the organizations: documenta 15 as an example of alternative organization*, relatrice Monica Calcagno, consapevole delle sanzioni previste dall'art. 76 del Testo unico, D.P.R. 28/12/2000 n.445, e della decadenza dei benefici prevista dall'art. 75 del medesimo Testo unico in caso di dichiarazioni false o mendaci, sotto la propria personale responsabilità ai sensi degli artt. 46 e 47 del D.P.R. 28/12/2000 n. 445,

DICHIARA

di NON aver fatto ricorso a tecnologie di intelligenza artificiale generativa per supportare vari aspetti della ricerca e della scrittura del suo elaborato finale/della sua tesi di laurea;

X di aver fatto ricorso a tecnologie di intelligenza artificiale generativa per supportare vari aspetti della ricerca e della scrittura del suo elaborato finale/della mia tesi di laurea, in particolare:

- *Grammarly Desktop Basic, 2026 © Grammarly Inc.;*
- *Lo strumento è stato utilizzato per un controllo finalizzato alla revisione e ottimizzazione dei testi per migliorare chiarezza e coerenza, in particolare dal punto di vista della grammatica inglese;*
- *Nelle varie sezioni e capitoli dell'elaborato;*
- *La correttezza, la qualità e l'attendibilità delle informazioni sono state verificate attraverso confronti diretti con la bibliografia primaria e un libro di grammatica inglese.*

DICHIARA INOLTRE

che tutto il materiale generato dall'IA è stato attentamente verificato, rivisto e rielaborato dall'autore/dall'autrice, che si assume la piena responsabilità per la qualità, l'accuratezza e l'integrità scientifica del lavoro.