



## **Learning about Community Engagement for Sustainable Cities: Takeaways from SciCultured**

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Submitted: 24. December 2024  
Published: 24. March 2025  
Volume: 12  
Issue: 2  
Affiliation: Journal of Science, Humanities, and Arts  
Languages: English  
Keywords: SciCultured, Inclusive Cities, Embodied Dialogue, Creative Pedagogies, Sustainability  
Categories: News and Views  
DOI: 10.17160/josha.12.2.1025

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# Learning about Community Engagement for Sustainable Cities: Takeaways from SciCultureD

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## Abstract

At the SciCultureD intensive course in Malta, JOSHA's editor-in-chief, Neher Aseem Parimoo, alongside co-authors and program coordinators Flora Brégeon and Valentina Delconte, explored how interdisciplinary collaboration can foster sustainable, inclusive cities. She reflects on the course's unique blend of workshops on placemaking, urban transformation and cultural identity, alongside discussions on inclusivity and participatory approaches. Using creative pedagogies such as embodied dialogue and soundscapes, the programme highlighted the importance of dialogue, creativity and co-creation in addressing societal challenges.

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What did an intrepid geneticist, citizen of the world, and the Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Science, Humanities and Arts (JOSHA) experience at the SciCultureD intensive course in the heart of the Mediterranean?

Neher Aseem Parimoo, with her multicultural and interdisciplinary background, focuses on building new connections and opportunities that can contribute towards bringing science closer to people in creative and meaningful ways. Additionally, she also designs curriculums for capacity building in science communication and public engagement. Neher was one of the 26 enthusiastic learners at the last intensive course, who deep-dived in Malta's sustainability quest for more inclusive, greener and just cities!

Discover her story and her acknowledgment on the importance of creativity and transdisciplinary collaborations for just societies! Now, it's time to discover her testimonial!



## -What was your favourite/surprising part of the course? And the most challenging one for you?

**Neher:** 'Apart from an impressive blend of partner institutions such as the University of Malta, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway, city2science, Germany, and ScienceView, Greece, this ERASMUS+ project is rooted in the ***ethos of inclusivity, active citizenship and participatory research approaches.***

The ***Valletta Design Cluster*** in Malta was offering a unique opportunity to engage with people with diverse perspectives, experiences and ideas. These interactions were curated and mediated by experts in science communication, design research, entrepreneurship and creative pedagogy.



Neher (on the right) and other SciCultureD participants during the movement session

Unique to each cohort, this course was centered around engaging communities to ***co-create just, inclusive and green cities in an urban context.*** Irrespective of the theme being unchartered territory, I was inspired to apply based on the curriculum because it integrated the eight creative pedagogies of dialogue, transdisciplinarity, collaborative and communal activities, balance and navigation, empowerment and agency, risk immersion and play, possibilities, ethics and trusteeship. It is precisely these skills that have tremendous potential to redefine education and outreach.

Our first day began with the ***'Discover' stage*** where we were introduced to our purpose for the week. Through non-directive approaches, the tutors expertly guided



us to understand and ponder over the value of places where diverse cultures and voices can find the space to sprout and collaborate. This included workshops on placemaking, urban street transformation, the public space and giving context to the cultural identity of Valletta.

The highlight for me was the incredibly candid and heartfelt talk by **Dr. Charles Xuereb**, an excellent historian from the University of Malta. He authored the book, '*Decolonising the Maltese Mind: In Search of Identity*' and sparked a rich dialogue on the historical Maltese existence and how different cultures have shaped its identity.



**Dr Charles Xuereb talking about Maltese cultural identity**

Halfway into the week, we were ready to brainstorm and mould our ideas towards more tangible outcomes. This is where I found myself on shaky ground as I feared getting lost in the technicalities of bringing a project to life. Luckily, I was in a room full of people who brought great value with their diverse disciplines and willingness to share.



We wrapped up this week-long learning spree with tons of creativity, laughter and inspiration as we shared our hopes and visions for a community that can co-create just, inclusive and green cities. I was filled with awe at the originality of expression from all the participants, not to mention how well the creative pedagogies were integrated into our concluding acts.'



## **-How do you think the transdisciplinary approach and the artistic tools will impact your work/activities?**

**Neher:** ‘Needless to say, I didn’t return to Freiburg as the same person who left for Malta. I came back with **a whole new perspective on thinking, learning and creating**. The multifaceted skill set brought with it a renewed motivation and confidence to put my thoughts into action not just at work but also in my daily life.

To begin with, my house is slowly turning into a forest to inculcate the change that I hope to inspire in the people around me. I often find myself turning to embodied dialogues to connect with the thoughts and emotions behind my inspirations. Acknowledging the impact of soundscapes has made me more attuned to my surroundings and certainly more appreciative of nature’s language.

I also see these skills adding a unique dimension to my work at JOSHA. The **multidisciplinary style** of the workshop has **changed my approach towards my daily tasks** right from planning and implementing workflows, establishing networks, promoting equity of knowledge and creating strategies to institutionalise transdisciplinarity.’

## **Acknowledgements**

SciCultureD is an Erasmus+ project, led by the University of Malta together with Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway, city2science, Germany, and Science View, Greece. It aims to nurture transdisciplinarity and innovative problem solving through the blending of arts, science and entrepreneurship. Funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

We extend our gratitude to Dr. Edward Duca, who serves as the SciCultureD project coordinator. Dr. Duca has played a pivotal role in envisioning and leading this project. With a strong background in science communication and innovation, he has consistently championed the integration of diverse disciplines to create meaningful engagement with science and research. His leadership has been central to the project’s success in fostering creativity and collaboration across fields.



## About the Authors

Neher Parimoo works as a Research Funding Manager at the Mertelsmann Foundation, where she manages projects on cancer and artificial intelligence. She is also Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Science, Humanities, and Arts (JOSHA), where she promotes open and inclusive publishing. With a background in biomedicine and genetics, Neher has contributed to research in neuropathology and molecular biology. She has participated in initiatives such as the SciCultureD Erasmus+ programme and Berlin Science Week, emphasising ethics and inclusivity in science.

Flora Brégeon is a French engineering student specialized in health and biology, with an interest in science communication. She took part in the SciCultureD project as an intern and worked on the project communication, with the aim of sharing the events, ideas and values of the project. Flora's desire is to open the doors of science to all, and to show that solving societal issues is possible with collaboration and creativity.

Valentina Delconte is the ScicultureD project manager at the Faculty of Education of the University of Malta from 2022. Valentina works behind the communications and runs diverse ScicultureD events, such as the intensive courses, multiplier events and the Final Conference held on October 29th in Valletta, Malta, in partnership with the project's partners. She is an enthusiastic nature lover with a background in conservation ecology from Wageningen University (the Netherlands), and several years of experience in science communication— her passion is learning and sharing stories about the people who are changing our world positively.