The Action Dove Graffiti: or Upscaling “Hands-on” Initiatives

When I saw the Action Dove¹ graffiti on the wall with its nest made of the phrase “HANDS-ON FAMAGUSTA”, in the old city of Nicosia, I thought about all those graffiti reclaiming messages sprayed by people keen in creating political messages through visual testing, coming from diverse political spectrums: from the left commenting on the increasingly worrying effects of the dominating neoliberal forces, to the extreme right screaming out their xenophobic chimacras, to the gangs perpetually marking their territories by signing on the walls and erasing other signatures. Could the Hands-on Famagusta Action Dove allude to an alternative, creative way of reengaging with our world even if it has to face two main challenges?

Challenge No 1: Usually, “hands-on” movements are initiated by the inhabitants of a locality encouraging a direct action on day-to-day issues. They relate to “hands-on urbanism: self-government, self-help, the power to create and the establishment of rules for a community formed by and around the space they collectively created”².

Notes
1. The Action Dove logo of the “Hands-on Famagusta” project is designed by Olof Jondellius and Robin Lee.
Consequently, one would expect to find an *Action Dove* graffiti sprayed on a wall in Famagusta by Famagustians. But, then the question would be: an *Action Dove* sprayed on a wall of which Famagusta, by which Famagustians, due to the actual ethnic and geographic division of the island. The 1963 bi-communal conflict trapped the Turkish Cypriot inhabitants of Famagusta within the mediaeval city until 1974. The 1974 war with Turkey forced the Greek Cypriot inhabitants of Famagusta, the majority of the city’s population, away from their homes into the south part of the island until now. The 1974 war forced some of the Turkish Cypriots in Paphos and other areas in the south part of Cyprus to flee to Famagusta and to coexist with an arriving population from Turkey, orchestrated by Turkey itself. Which Famagusta, then, since the actual Famagustian territory is fragmented into all sorts of enclaves with the most notorious one that of the ghost area of Famagusta sealed off by the Turkish troops since 1974?

When I look again to the painted *Action Dove* graffiti, I sense that it is taking off its nest made of the phrase “HANDS-ON FAMAGUSTA”, giving me the feeling that even if the “hands-on” should have been of Famagustians for Famagusta, I have the right to claim that “We are all Famagustans”. I claim that in the sense that “Hands-on Famagusta” is a network platform that supports collectively created spaces and assists active citizens to reclaim politics in contested territories such as Cyprus. In fact, “Hands-on Politics” could have been a rephrase of the words defining the nest of the *Action Dove*, pushing us to re-engage in politics by imagining the future of post-traumatic urban territories.

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**Q: ONE DAY HANDS ON FAMAGUSTA ENVISIONS A WORLD WHERE?**
A: common places can thrive in contested spaces... the design of shared spaces will not be a random product of power... trauma will be touched and healed successfully to enable a more tolerant and joyful togetherness... Hands On Famagusta is an open ended platform of participation which is enriched by contribution of users

**Q: HANDS-ON FAMAGUSTA PERSONALITY: IF HOF WAS A CAR BRAND WHICH WOULD IT BE AND WHY?**
A: Volkswagen, because it addresses a wide range of customers starting from a modest polo to a luxurious cabriolet... Hands on Famagusta would be a bicycle and would never be a car... Volkswagen, old and new together for all... It wouldn’t be a car. It would be a tricycle. Or a minibus...
Q: WHAT IS HANDS-ON FAMAGUSTA’S CORE PURPOSE?
A: Re-claiming politics in our way... Facilitate discussions for spatial decisions on the city... Creating mutual understanding and respect for the two communities to envision a common urban future

Q: WHAT ARE HANDS-ON FAMAGUSTA’S CORE VALUES?
A: Disenclavizing as empowerment, participation, informality... Engaged, creative, controversial... Participatory, Collaboration, Inviting

Q: THINKING ABOUT HOW WHAT WORDS WILL COME TO MIND?
A: Fair, empowering, inclusive, inspirational, creative... Famagusta, active citizenship, Engaging in spatial decision processes, Urban design, Imaginaries

Fig. 4 The Action Dove graffiti, Nicosia Cyprus
Fig. 5 Foldable Action Dove
paper stencil for inconspicuous
travels across the Cypriot divide

Notes
3. Cornelius Castoriades,
L'institution imaginaire de la
société (Paris, France: Éditions

Q: IF HOF WAS A CELEBRITY WHO
WOULD IT BE AND WHY?
A: Wim Wenders. I love his movies. He is
brilliant at disconnecting images with sto-
ries, multiplying possible imaginations... No
idea! (... It would not be a celebrity... John
Lennon!! Invitation to imagine...

Q: WHAT DOES HOF WANT TO BE KNOWN FOR?
WHAT IS HOF'S PROMISE
A: An Agent of Reconciliation to provide support structures for public de-
bates in a contested country...... HOF is known for its innovative approach
to participatory planning practices... Providing tools for people to participate
into developing a common vision... A political project that creates a public
platform of participation for negotiating our cities future...
Challenge No 2: Usually, “Hands-on” movements demand immediate outcomes during their operation time. Consequently, one would expect not only to see the action dove sprayed only on a wall in Famagusta but also to see a result in a neighborhood of the city, like all those “hands-on-urbanism” outcomes based on bricolage concepts having to do with the immediate availability of means.

When I replace the word “FAMAGUSTA” from the action dove’s nest, with that of “POLITICS”, the action dove becomes a message from all the inhabitants of divided territories to reclaim politics by imagining possible futures for sharing such territories. What the inhabitants need is a technology that supports the collective creation of instant territories, physical, networked and imaginary, that enhance their participation in temporal communities, beyond their ethnic ones. The “Hands-on Famagusta” project has constructed such instant territories to reink the present with the future, to demand immediate outcomes regarding imaginaries of the future of a city, after the reunification of the island. An additional role of such instant territories is to reclaim the public sphere of a devastated city due to both war traumas and neoliberal privatizing realms. Could the outcome of such “instant” territories equip the city authorities to withstand the forthcoming tsunami of privatizing developing pressures?

The immediate outcomes of the “Hands-on Famagusta” project are materialized in our minds contributing to the change of the Imaginary Institution of our society manifesting itself on the transformation of the urban environment. The volatility of the action dove contrasted by the anchoring gesture of the hand implies the struggle of such endeavor: how to navigate in conditions of political irresolution by demonstrating the conflictual character of the making of the urban and by promoting new alliances of urban actors across the divide.

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Q: Why should people visit the web platform?
A: To dream... To participate, to contribute, to learn, to share... Curiosity towards possible futures of Famagusta, to learn about the city... To test their ideas through the game... To explore unsaid facts and possibilities of their cities...

Q: If HOF was an animal, what would it be and why?
A: tenacious like a badger, strong like a lion, nimble like a cat... A turtle moving steady and slowly. Whenever it gets tired its home is available on the move... It would be a wolf within a pack... Penguin, beautiful alone but needs a community to survive... Owl. I like owls. If we are not owl, we might be a shallow. In general, HOF is a bird...