2. EXCELLENCE

2.1   QUALITY AND CREDIBILITY OF THE RESEARCH

2.1.1 Environmental Impacts – an impulse to change

The biological, physical and technological impacts on habitats are significant

Contemporary times are marked by dynamic environmental changes, understood in terms of strong impacts being put on our ecosystems. Such impacts are caused by variety of factors produced by humans, which counter affect their habitats. The urgent demand of their assessment has been recognized and followed by a call for proper action (Jay et al. 2007).
Answering the call, we recognize those impacts, taking place in at least three important dimensions of human existence, that is biological, physical and technological aspects of environmental cohabitation.

- The biological impacts are related to such important spheres as biological control (Howarth 1991) or environmental impacts of diseases and epidemics (Singh & Mishra 2021), which shape our contemporary reality in reference to reduced mobility and limited human to human contacts.

- The physical impacts are defined by us in terms of transformations of human physical habitats. They refer to particular changes in physical and cultural landscapes shaped by factors such as extreme weather pheonomena (Berghäll & Pesu 2008) and also more general changes such as urbanization of nature, which results in processes of intertwining of rural and urban life patterns (Swyngendouw & Kaika 2000).

- The environmental impact of modern technologies on processes of reshaping human habitats is undeniable. We refer especially to rapid development of electronic media which transform our modes of communication and behavior (Myoo S 2015, 2021). We recognize the significant growth of hybrid (physical and electronic) environments offering enhanced forms of life experiences and immersed activities, thus enabling new lifestyle patterns. The trend shows, that nowadays people learn, work and entertain themselves through virtual (VR) and augmented reality (AR) increasingly, what is followed by formation of new kinds of communities, the "virtual communities" (Rheingold 1993, Cipresso et al. 2018).

The new narrative - a threat and opportunity

The mentioned spheres have been already recognized as crucial areas of the environmental change, that is taking place on our planet. It seems however, that, after the time of "the Collapse of Meta Narratives" reported by Jean Francois Lyotard (1979), the XXI century will be marked by an organized push on the new global narrative, reversing the environmental threats on opportunities. In fact, the idea of shaping the future actively under narration of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has been yet already implemented in all mentioned areas (Schwab 2016). Advances such as Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, 3D print, "green energy" system, quantum computing and robotics are being applied to our daily life, blurring the boundaries between what is digital and "traditional" physical and biological life, in quest to asses and balance environmental impacts, such as global warming, energy crisis, pandemics and many others. What is striking however, that in parallel to its progressive acting in spheres of production and management, the 4IR distinctly lacks of recognition to some important issues of ethical, sociological and aesthetic nature (Adams et al. 2021). In spite of the fact that, the 4IR is explicitly aimed on synergy of components of biological, physical and technological matters, its origins remain purely economical, thus it simply does not discerns its moral, social and aesthetic consequences (Ngwane & Malehoko 2021, Peckham 2021). The CAPHE project team composes of aestheticians, art critiques, scientists, artists and philosophers, who perceive this situation as a challenge and invitation to critical revaluation of goals and methods of the 4IR, in quest to take into account the sphere of autonomy of artistic and aesthetic experience. In this regard, we propose to include and

investigate the aesthetic dimension of the social-environmental transformation, thus putting stress on social aspects of sensiblity and senses (Berleant 2010). We follow then, the idea of so called "aesthetic community", the term coined by Arnold Berleant, who perceived the desired element of synergy neither in following, the rational, thus external and ideal type of community, nor in restoration of traditional, static lifestyle patterns, but in such type of community, that is arising directly from the common art experience (Berleant 1994). Thus, answering the Berleant's call we plan to build our investigation model on social-artistic participation.

2.1.2 Communities and artistic participation. What? Why? How?

The social turn and dialogical art

The "social turn" in arts refers to artistic practices which are collaborative, participatory and involve people as "medium or material" (Bishop 2006). Thus, such activities usually take place outside of formal spaces of art institutions and enact interaction in peoples everyday environments. Their occurrence is identified as a result of overcoming and abandoning the object-oriented artistic methodologies in favor of "process-based, performative approach" (Kester 2005). In this regard, Grant Kester uses the Peter Dunn's famous metaphor to differentiate between so called "object providers" and "context providers", to identify the latter as representatives of the new "dialogical art". (Kester, 2004, 2005). The art which creates bonds with performer and community and provides tools for their mutual transformation. The CAPHE research team aims to follow the idea in quest to investigate new possibilities of artistic interaction and social transformation in a form of an interdisciplinary and intermedia experimental project, which can define the new context for artistic, communal participation itself.

The Community

The aforementioned, "process – based approach" involves an adequate, fluid and dynamic understanding of community which is following the dynamics of modern life. Our understanding of community arises from an idea of so called "non-consensual democracy", which promotes the notion of democracy as a medium of communication (Koczanowicz 2015). In this notion, the community is identified as "critical", as it reveals such features as dialogicality, self-reflection and ability to discuss its own tradition (Ibid.). However, the further understanding of the community communication concept in CAPHE project is enhanced by a push on its material aspects and its pragmatic and aesthetic dimension. First, recognizing consequences of the "material turn" in humanities, we define it in terms of a discourse of social-material practices (Lockwood Harris 2016). Thus, we treat communication not as a flow of abstract symbols but as kind of material agency, which is producing understanding through embodied intra-action of actants (Barad 2007). This means a dynamic, processual concept of environmental information exchange in which individuals are emergent through activities. In this area, we recognize the importance of categories of "apparatus" (Barad 2003) and "assemblage" (Tsing 2015) in relation to communities established through "open – ended practices" and defined as "open-ended gatherings". We follow such understanding of those spheres according to which, they play a key role in ecological redefinition of communal activities, understood as kind of evolving practice producing new life patterns (Nikolić 2017, Petri 2020). Community is then understood more as an ephemeral collective, a kind of a happening, definitely not as an pre-established entity with limited set of rules. Then, we appeal directly to pragmatist notion of community as an "aesthetic community", continuity of which is defined "beyond measures of absorption or assimilation and external relations between separate objects, but establishes itself through conectedness within a whole" and is characterized by "immediacy that is directly present and real to experience" (Berleant 1994). Hence, we follow Berleant's dynamic notion of aesthetic community as reshaped by "relations inherent in the situation in ways that are concrete and operative", what leads to understanding the community as a "continuum of body, of consciousness, of context, all joined in the pervasive continuity of perception" (Berleant 1994).

Art invigorating the community

In respect of artistic activities, we follow then such concepts of art and aesthetics, which bond closely arts, communities and daily life experiences (Dewey 1934). Following the pragmatist approach, each community member is treated as a potential artist, capable of „artful life of social interaction", which has a serious potential to transform the community (Goldblatt 2006). Thus, artistic participation is neither understood an an external activity, nor a site specific practice, but rather yet more integral process of environmental exchange, the form of deep social-cultural engagement, arising from actual needs and desires. What's important, in this perspective, the artistic activity performed through communities is not only limited to barely an inter or intra-action with people and materials, but in the same time it becomes a kind of socially engaged research methodology (Hickey – Moody 2020). We treat art practice as a qualitative research method and put stress on "non-verbal, aesthetic and culturally coded forms of information exchange" (Hickey – Moody 2017).

2.1.3. Toward hybridity. Quality of new environmental interaction

Regarding the mentioned context of performative synergy of biological, physical and digital components, which is believed to shape our future, its significant impact on arts has been yet recognized (Badrul 2019). However, the question which remains unanswered is: do we have to take for granted the initial technologies invented in labs or do we have the right and ability to transform them according to our needs and desires in process of art creation, education and social interaction? In other words, if the "medium is a message", do we have the right and ability to modulate our communication thus to modulate and blend the media at their very foundation? The need for such practice has been yet recognized, but to some extent, as claims in that sphere seem to be limited to such issues as shaping the designed environments to "let people express their real potentials and be in touch with their positive emotions" (Schiuma 2017). Such idea of "fostering people's aesthetic experiences" (Ibid), however yet based on new technologies of the forthcoming digital age, seems to duplicate and enforce inequalities of contemporary media schema, with the strong division on "editors" and "users". What's even more important, it tends to ignore the question of artistic freedom, formatting aesthetic experiences to controllable, easy to manage and present set of data (Ożóg 2017)

The CAPHE project is focused on traversing the mentioned dualism and investigating both on the aesthetic and organizational quality of the process of fusion between elements of biological, physical and technological origin, in performed environment of hybrid nature, easing the artistic interaction through communities. To fill in the goal, we concentrate especially on immersion process as a key factor for fruitful symbiosis of elements performed in Virtual and Augmented Reality. The process is understood by our team in categories of extension of living, an intensified presence, through new channels and modes of environmental communication (Slater & Sanchez – Vives 2016). We define this environment in terms of hybridity, to avoid the enforced, conceptual dualism between what is virtual and physical, pointing on its symbiosis in context of live experience (Myoo 2015). We focus also on such transformation of intermedia tools, which promotes their non-commercial and critical use, allowing for uttermost spontaneous aesthetic expression (Ożóg 2017). In the same time, we rise questions on authors rights in hybrid environment, recognizing its legal and social consequences.

Thus, for the duration of the project, with the use of AltspaceVR platform, we intend to launch and operate an experimental, hybrid environment to stimulate and research the process of social-artistic interaction. The aim of the project is to investigate and perform the possibility of elaboration of an enhanced model of interaction and somatic participation between artists and communities, coming from different cultural backgrounds. The environment will engage artists, communities and researchers coming from six countries, from two continents (Europe and Africa) who will participate to:

- research on immersion modes through art presented in AltspaceVR
- develop education of art through AltspaceVR
- research on enhancement of artistic experience through AltspaceVR
- research on possibilities of enhancement of somatic reception of art through AltspaceVR
- research on effectiveness of enhancement of community interaction through participation in artistic performance
- develop new dimension of integration of community through participating in artistic performance