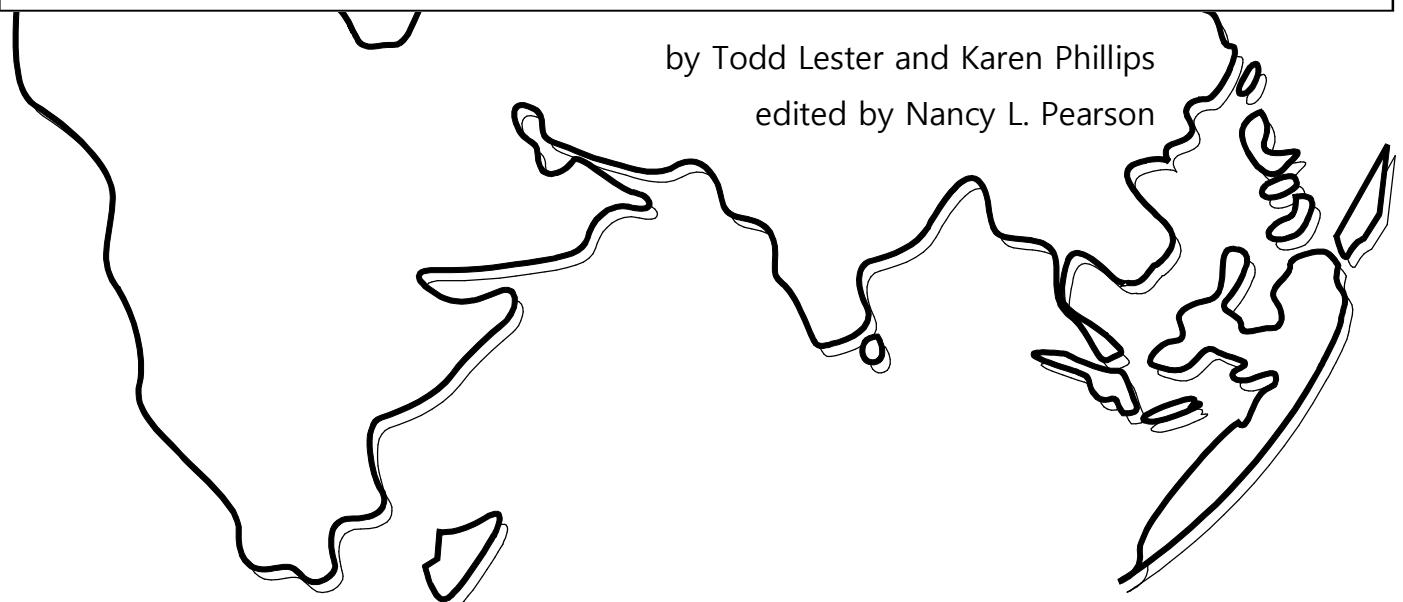


## **Art Spaces Hosting Activism**

Using surplus resources to provide individual assistance and  
strengthen community engagement

by Todd Lester and Karen Phillips

edited by Nancy L. Pearson



**NEWTactics**  
in Human Rights

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## Biographies and Organizational Information



**Todd Lester** is the founder of freeDimensional (fD) and more recently the Creative Resistance Fund. Before launching freeDimensional he served as Information & Advocacy Manager for the International Rescue Committee in Sudan. Todd holds a Masters of Public Administration from Rutgers University and is a graduate of the Refugee Studies Centre's Summer School in Forced Migration at Oxford University. Todd is adjunct faculty in Media Studies at the New School for Social Research from which he received a Film Production Diploma. He is active in several networks, think tanks and boards, most notably, the World Policy Institute, 21st Century Trust, Res Artis, and the Carnegie Council New Leaders Program. In 2006, Todd received the Peace Corps Fund Award for his work starting freeDimensional and was named 'Architect of the Future' by the Waldzell Institute in 2008.



**Karen Phillips** joined freeDimensional in 2008 where she was instrumental in developing its Distress Services program and launching the Emerging Art Space Support Initiative. Prior to joining freeDimensional, Karen worked at the Committee to Protect Journalists assisting journalists-in-distress and in PEN American Center's Freedom to Write Program. She is a co-founder of the Proyecto Victoria Ocampo, a residency and art space in rural Argentina. In 2009 she received a Foreign Language and Area Studies grant to study cultural policy in Brazil. Karen holds a B.A. with honors from Smith College and an M.P.A. in International Management and Policy from New York University's Wagner School for Public Service. Her writing and research has been published in *Dangerous Assignments*, *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, and on her blog, [cultureplease.blogspot.com](http://cultureplease.blogspot.com). She is currently developing curriculum on international cultural policy issues for a course to be taught at NYU Abu Dhabi.



critical people  
critical places  
critical issues

### freeDimensional (fD)

Based on the belief that creative expression fuels social justice movements, [freeDimensional](#) (fD) works with the global arts community to identify and redistribute resources, and support meaningful relationships between art spaces and activists. fD is an international network that advances social justice by hosting activists in distress in art spaces and using cultural resources to strengthen their work. The network is made up of over 300 affiliated art spaces around the world with regional hubs in São Paulo, Cairo, New York City, Berlin, and at a multi-site residency in India. fD provides resources and safe haven for oppressed activists and culture workers; facilitates knowledge-sharing among art spaces who actively participate in local community organizing; and engages the art world and mainstream media to heighten public awareness and influence policy change on critical issues.

Throughout its work, fD aims to engage with and foster solidarity among marginalized groups, including LGBT communities, people experiencing economic oppression, people with disabilities, migrants, and young people. fD is also committed to promoting long-term economic and environmental sustainability within its network of art centers and human rights organizations.

fD is a decentralized organization that recognizes the power of strategic partnerships throughout its work. Rather than a top-down imposition of values and programs, fD works with local civil society groups, social movements of all scales, arts organizations, schools and independent media outlets to build meaningful grassroots programs. fD is powered by the energy of its members, many of whom volunteer their time and resources to ensure that this work continues.

freeDimensional

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September 2010

Dear Friend,

Welcome to the New Tactics in Human Rights Tactical Notebook Series! In each notebook a human rights practitioner describes an innovative tactic that was used successfully in advancing human rights. The authors are part of the broad and diverse human rights movement including non-government and government perspectives, educators, law enforcement personnel, truth and reconciliation processes, women's rights, mental health advocates, and so many more. They have both adapted and pioneered tactics that have contributed to human rights in their home countries. In addition, they have utilized tactics that when adapted can be applied in other countries and other situations to address a variety of issues.

Each notebook contains detailed information on *how* the author and his or her organization achieved what they did. We want to inspire other human rights practitioners to think *tactically* – and to broaden the realm of tactics considered in order to strengthen their strategies to effectively advance human rights.

This notebook will discuss how freeDimensional (fD) has developed a creative and collaborative process for using surplus resources to provide assistance and safe haven to culture workers in distress. fD's worldwide network bridges what are often considered two different worlds - art spaces and human rights organizations. fD's model inspires ideas for bridging other seemingly incompatible groups and networks in order to further their respective missions while maximizing resources available from each.

The entire series of Tactical Notebooks is available online at [www.newtactics.org](http://www.newtactics.org). Additional notebooks are already available and others will continue to be added over time. On our web site you will also find other tools, including a searchable database of tactics, discussion forums for human rights practitioners, tools for action, and information about our workshops. To subscribe to the New Tactics newsletter, please join our on-line community or send an e-mail to: [newtactics@cvt.org](mailto:newtactics@cvt.org)

The New Tactics in Human Rights Project is an international initiative led by a diverse group of organizations and practitioners from around the world. The project is coordinated by the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) and grew out of our experiences as a creator of new tactics and as a treatment center that also advocates for the protection of human rights from a unique position—one of healing and reclaiming civic leadership.

We hope that you will find these notebooks informational and thought provoking.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy L. Pearson".

Nancy L. Pearson  
New Tactics in Human Rights Project Manager

## Introduction

Each year, hundreds of culture workers are violently assaulted for pursuing their ideas of social change: as activist community leaders they lose their jobs; face arbitrary imprisonment and torture; and may ultimately die for speaking truth to power. The levels of threat and actions directed against these individuals cause them to live in a state of extraordinary distress. Culture workers in distress often need assistance due to these circumstances. Sometimes these individuals need to physically move away from their communities in order to escape danger. The human rights community has always shown immense dedication to help individuals who find themselves in danger due to their political and/or artistic expression. Many organizations aim to assist culture workers in finding safe haven in other countries. However, this process is quite costly, and at times organizations find it challenging to gather the necessary finances as well as an appropriate form of accommodation. Culture workers in distress are freeDimensional's primary stakeholders and may include activist public intellectuals, artists, journalists, musicians, writers, theatre directors, and community organizers, as well as human rights defenders on a range of issues. Today it is not uncommon for culture workers who are civil society actors to work in multiple mediums; and culture is a common ingredient in projects striving for social justice and equality.

freeDimensional (fD) has devised a collaborative approach that builds partnerships between arts residencies and human rights organizations worldwide to provide a wide variety of Distress Services to those in need including Creative Safe Haven. The Creative Safe Haven initiative brings about a ground-breaking idea: using surplus bedrooms of artist residency programs to counter the accommodation dilemma faced by the human rights community who know, and are connected to, oppressed activists in need of a safe place to live when fleeing danger. Creative Safe Haven (CSH) not only decreases the possible costs of finding safe haven but it distributes them among multiple actors making it more manageable to reach the goal of placing an individual. The process of providing CSH includes outreach, collaboration and coordination among many networks and organizations. Each contributes a necessary and critical link as well as distributes responsibilities to create a safe haven.

Creative Safe Haven (CSH) utilizes the existing accommodation capacity of arts residencies in order to resolve the accommodation dilemma faced by the human rights community. The process of CSH enables culture workers in distress to find temporary safe haven (typically ranging from 2 weeks to 3 months) in an art space. Thanks to this process, culture workers in distress not only receive a safe place to stay but are supported in continuing their artistic work and engage with the surrounding community. fD's concept of Creative Safe Haven is rooted in the idea that community art spaces are local civil society spaces and therefore effective access

points for social action and change.

Since launching our Distress Services, including the Creative Safe Haven model in 2005, fD's support network has been drawn upon in 60 cases over the past four years to help activist artists, journalists, musicians, writers, theatre directors, and community organizers from more than 30 countries in a wide variety of ways.

As of today, the freeDimensional network has over 300 affiliated art spaces in 60 countries. fD has regional hubs in São Paulo, Cairo, New York City, Berlin, and at a multi-site residency in India. These art spaces—located around the world in large cities and in small communities—can perform urgent interventions such as hosting an individual in distress, but also by working in a networked fashion, they assume a unique level of influence in civil society from which the general public and decision-makers seek advice and input on pressing issues.

This tactical notebook will share this creative and collaborative process of using surplus resources to provide assistance and a safe haven for culture workers in distress, who have been living through threats, violence, and oppression of many sorts. In turn, these culture workers provide a unique opportunity for art spaces to strengthen and engage their own communities.

### fD Stakeholder Perspective



*The organization like fD is very important to exist. I was scared and I don't know what I can do, where I have to go or to whom I should contact to get some emergency help. If I don't meet with fD, I really don't know what I can do.*

*To be truthful, there is no freedom to create art inside or outside the country [Burma]. When I was outside the country for the first time, I thought that I was free and free to do anything. But fear rode piggyback...We always take into account that we have to return home.*

—Chaw ei Thein  
January 2009

## **Background and Development**

### ***Connecting Different Worlds through Creative Safe Haven***

The human rights community has always shown immense dedication to help individuals who find themselves in danger due to their political and/or artistic expression in gaining asylum. This process is quite costly, and at times organizations find it challenging to gather the necessary finances as well as an appropriate form of accommodation.

Art spaces have always been willing to host intellectuals, activists, and socially-engaged artists. There have been high profile cases like Salman Rushdie and many more that have been low profile. Based on the belief that creative expression fuels social justice movements, fD works with the global arts community to identify and redistribute resources, and support meaningful relationships between art spaces and activists.

freeDimensional founder, Todd Lester explains, “Having witnessed the sheer range of challenges that activists and culture workers around the world face as a result of political struggles in their homelands, I sought to connect the human rights and the arts communities together. In 2005 there was both a Res Artis meeting in Berlin ([www.resartis.org](http://www.resartis.org)) and a Frontline Defenders meeting in Dublin within a month. (<http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/>) I saw this as a great opportunity to dialogue with both the artist residency sector and human rights community asking the former if they would offer up their surplus living spaces and the latter if they would use these available safe haven sites if they were offered. The response was positive but how would they link together?”

Through these events and the resulting enthusiasm, freeDimensional was set in motion to identify the overlap between these two sectors, encouraging them towards innovations that break down professional boundaries and affect systemic social change. freeDimensional was established in 2006 by Todd Lester, filmmaker Hugo Espinel, and Alexandra Zobel, a literature professor both from Colombia. fD’s first step was to organize an international network of artist residency initiatives to provide safe haven for activists and cultural workers during crucial periods, when they are persecuted in – and ultimately exiled from – their own countries.

### ***Opening the Space between Human Rights and the Arts***

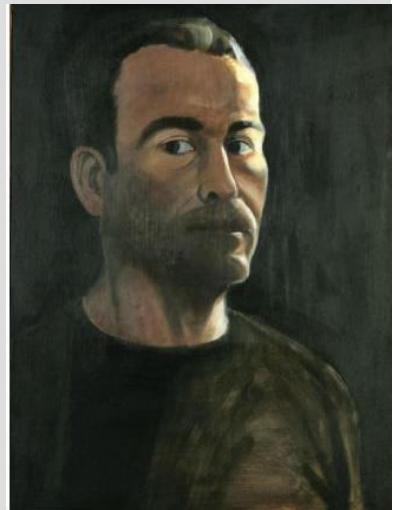
The Creative Safe Haven initiative brings about a groundbreaking idea: Partnerships originating from within the arts community provide available space to accommodate threatened activists, cases which the human rights community tracks and often attempts to resolve. Creative Safe Haven not only decreases the possible costs of finding

safe haven, but it distributes them among multiple actors, making it more manageable to reach the goal of responding to and placing an individual in need. This notebook shares and explores the variety of benefits stemming from utilizing networks within the arts world. fD’s chosen role is that of raising the confidence of art spaces to do this work by sharing lessons learned around the network. fD’s challenge – bringing these two communities together – the arts community, and their spaces, and the needs of human rights activists. fD also has a role in sensitizing the human rights world to the role of art spaces as local civil society spaces and therefore effective access points for social action and change. These art spaces can perform urgent interventions such as hosting an individual in distress, but also by working in a networked fashion, they assume a unique level of influence in civil society from which the general public and decision-makers seek advice and input on pressing issues. As hosts, arts organizations hold a different kind of “knowledge” of their local community including local language, resources, and politics. Art spaces offer a human connection that other accommodation providers (e.g. hospitality industry) cannot. When an individual is in need of safe haven, an art space possesses a unique ability to invite an individual into their space and nurture them.

The process of Creative Safe Haven begins when a culture worker in distress is brought to the attention of fD. There is no “typical” case. Each is as unique as the person in need of safe haven. When a culture worker in dis-

#### **fD Stakeholder Perspective**

“The residency that I get in Bilbao gave me the chance to enjoy for three months to make art. It was my first time in my life that I get this chance to be and to feel free, to make art without all my previous problems, to enjoy my freedom in another place. It was for me special and a great experience...fD was the reason for this experience...I never forget this chance.”



— Fahed Halabi

tress becomes known, the process of connecting potential art spaces with the culture worker begins. This process is a work of art in motion – weaving together a web of many relationships to create a safe haven. These relationships are taking place simultaneously – a bit like a juggler with a number of balls circling in the air and lightly touching the hands at various intervals. Creative Safe Haven engages a number of stakeholders who share



Source: graphic credit:  
<http://www.istockphoto.com/stock-illustration-1473310-life.php>

responsibilities. fD may start the process but others pick up the “balls” to keep the process moving toward a solution for the individual in distress.

The following section outlines this juggling process and the web of relationships involved. The case examples illustrate the “balls” as they are being juggled in the air.

munities. fD depends on these artists’ residency spaces for accommodating a culture worker in distress for a period of 2 weeks to 3 months. After this time period, culture workers assisted by the fD network either continue into a more permanent exile arrangement, find another short-term placement, or may be able to return home.

In addition to Creative Safe Haven, art spaces also play a key role in uncovering other resources in their communities that could serve a person-in-distress such as psycho-social, health, and legal services.

### ***Human Rights Organizations***

Over 50 human rights organizations work with fD and, who, in addition to nominating cases for Creative Safe Haven, are aware of other resources or have distress funding that could help individual culture workers in distress. The Creative Safe Haven process often involves more than one other organization that provides referrals or direct support to the person in need.

### ***Academic and Other Hosting Institutions***

fD routinely nominates Distress Services cases to other hosting organizations and academic opportunities such as fellowships. Often, a culture worker in distress can benefit from a politically neutral placement in an academic institution while the situation they faced at home calms down or while they make important decisions about their next steps.

#### **freeDimensional Founder**

*From 2002-03, I was the manager of a project called ‘Conflict Prevention, Effective Communication and Local Democratic Capacity-Building in the Southern Caucasus’ with American University’s Center for Global Peace.*



*Our goal was to organize and facilitate cross-border task-forces (and sectoral projects) for Turkish, Armenian and Azerbaijani NGOs and municipal leaders under the auspices of Track II diplomacy, commonly called ‘informal’ or ‘citizen’ diplomacy. In light of the fact that we could never convene all the community leaders involved in one of their own countries, my colleague Diana Fakiola had the bright idea to invite them to her family’s farm on the island of Tzia (an hour ferry ride from Athens, Greece). Not only did this address our ‘conference hotel’ fatigue, but something amazing happened: all it took was having a barbecue and going swimming together and sitting in lawn chairs around a fire to reduce the hard lines of decades-old-hostilities to manageable negotiations that could be solved in a mutually beneficial manner.*

*And for me, the idea of ‘hosting’ – which is foundational to freeDimensional – started taking shape.*

—Todd Lester

## **fD Distress Services**

### **Key Players in Creative Safe Haven**

#### ***Culture Worker in Distress***

fD considers public intellectuals, activist artists, journalists, musicians, writers, theatre directors, and community organizers, as well as other human rights activists whose work exposes them to persecution as eligible for Creative Safe Haven. Persecution can include but is not limited to physical attack, imprisonment, torture, social and economic exclusion, harassment, death threats, and criminal charges.

#### ***Nominators***

Concerned organizations or individuals that contact fD both act as nominators who tell fD about an oppressed activist. The organizations that contact fD are typically either human rights organizations or arts and cultural organizations and networks. Organizations that have nominated individuals to fD include: The Committee to Protect Journalists, Amnesty International, Scholars at Risk, FREEMUSE, PEN, and Art Moves Africa, among others. Also fD accepts self-nominations from oppressed activists and culture workers.

#### ***Resource providers***

Once fD has determined that an individual is eligible for services, fD assesses his or her needs and taps into a large network of organizations and individuals that have access to resources and can provide needed support. The primary resource providers are art spaces, human rights organizations, academic and other hosting organizations, and concerned individuals with the knowledge of additional services in the geographic or issue area of the activist.

To date there are over 300 art spaces with residency apartments affiliated with the fD network. Art spaces are located around the world in large cities and in small com-

Besides academic institutions, fD maintains relationships with other programs like the International Cities of Refuge and Cities of Asylum networks. These programs can offer longer-term hosting alternatives for culture workers in distress.

### **Concerned Individuals**

fD program network includes an array of individuals that are disposed to offering advice, resources, and solidarity to culture workers in distress. fD finds that when a culture worker goes into short or long-term exile, a visit from a friendly face from the country of exile can go a long way to easing the mental and emotional stress of leaving one's country. These individuals are often a pool of knowledge about opportunities and resources for the culture worker in distress.

### **freeDimensional Staff, Case Consultants, and Volunteers**

fD's internal staff, consultants, and volunteers serve as the hub that connects the various parties in the provision of Creative Safe Haven and Distress Services. fD carefully reviews nominated cases through research and interviews; assesses the distressed culture worker's needs and resources; develops a plan based on the resources to be found in the fD network; and implements this plan by interfacing between the culture worker in distress and resource providers. fD tracks this work so that we can learn from the Creative Safe Haven and Distress Service provision process and maintains a database of contacts and partners.

## **General Steps in the Creative Safe Haven Process**

Creative Safe Haven, as developed by fD, is typically a last resort solution for culture workers in distress. To generalize the Creative Safe Haven process runs the risk of understating the tailored collaborative steps that organizations and artists take in each case. The uniqueness of each art space and culture worker seeking safe haven accounts for the great diversity of collaborations that fD's program has facilitated. In its essence, Creative Safe Haven is a synergistic relationship between the culture worker and the hosting space. The art space may fill a number of roles: researching and/or referring legal, health (mental and physical), social services, and other community support. The art space provides a haven for the culture worker in distress to continue to work on their projects (artistic and otherwise), engage with artists in the space, and often use their experience to engage the local community.

Although each case is unique, fD has identified a general process in which the many pieces connect and weave together. A number of case examples will be shared to provide an understanding of both the uniqueness and the flow of the general process. The examples show areas that require attention and challenges that need to be overcome.

### **fD Stakeholder – Art Space Perspective Ledig House and Pierre Mumbere Mijobma**

freeDimensional received a request for safe haven for Congolese playwright and novelist, Pierre Mumbere Mijobma, author of seven plays and a novel, *Ecce Ego*, published in France in 2002. His conflict with the Congolese government began in January 2003 after the performance of his play, *The Last Envelope*, in Kinshasa. The "commedia-style" farce with extravagant language, a detailed plot, and underhanded allegory, reveals the excesses of the Mobutu regime in the former Zaire. Shortly after its first performance, Mijobma was threatened and his landlord was kidnapped.



fD sent out a call to their extensive network of art spaces around the world and Ledig House in upstate New York responded. The Ledig House, an international writers' residency located in upstate New York, introduced Pierre's case to their board of directors, which saw Pierre's need for a safe space and agreed to collaborate with freeDimensional. Ledig House offered a vacant space to Pierre and he arrived to the Ledig House on April 4, 2007 and stayed until June 8, 2007.

Pierre's case presented an additional challenge. He needed a place for his family to be safe as well. A solution was found through a near-by university (about an hour away from the residency). A faculty member was on sabbatical who offered use of a house to Pierre's family. By building a connection and explaining Pierre's family's situation to the university's administration, the family received an in-kind donation for housing. As a result, Pierre was able to visit his family on a regular basis and also stay at an art residency to focus on the work that is so crucial in fostering progress in his homeland. During his stay in the residency, Pierre shared his story with the local community, fellow artists, and fellow Congolese who had also fled the DRC. The stories that Pierre shares both personally and through his plays embody the synergy of arts and human rights.

Hosting culture workers in distress has had a tremendous impact. Through conversations and building relationships with culture workers in distress, the writers in residency have broadened their perspective on the roles of censorship and human rights in the lives of artists around the world.

The surrounding community has had a chance to meet with artists and listen to their stories. And the organization itself has gathered motivation on what roles they can play to advance human rights through their work. Creative Safe Haven has allowed Ledig House to grow in its organizational mission.

—DW Gibson, Formerly at Ledig House  
Currently, Co-Director of Sangam House Writers' Residency  
Pondicherry, India

The following components of most Creative Safe Haven placements do not necessarily happen sequentially but more often simultaneously:

1. **Nomination of a culture worker in distress** to fD by a human rights organization or an individual.
2. **Intake form** from the culture worker describing the current situation, reasons for experiencing persecution, and basic demographic information. **Assessment of the case** that confirms with outside sources and referees the validity of the persecution faced by the cultural worker..
3. **Search for a host**—fD sends out a call for placement to its wide network of art spaces.
4. **Matching and Placement Process** matches the art space available with the culture worker.
5. **Post Placement Planning** makes plans for the time a culture worker must leave the art space.

### 1. Nomination of a Culture Worker in Distress

There are two primary ways through which an individual is nominated for Creative Safe Haven.

First, an organization can nominate a culture worker in distress. At times, organizations that assist individuals in distress are focused on a specific expertise, for example professors or journalists. When an organization knows of a person in need of assistance but does not qualify to receive resources, they can fill out an intake form and send it to fD. (Official intake forms are available online. <http://freedimensional.org/services/distress-services>)

The second way is self-nomination. A culture worker in distress can personally fill out the intake form. This may at times be difficult due to restricted access to technology, and censorship may limit an individual's access to the

intake form. In addition to the intake form, three personal references need to be provided, detailing the nominee's situation and current needs.

### 2. Intake Form & Assessment of the Case

The intake form outlines the following aspects (see appendix for copy of the intake form):

- Basic contact and personal information
- Description of current situation
- Description of the kind and extent of persecution (for example, how is the persecution expressed via the person's work)

A wide variety of issues need to be explored in the assessment of a case in order to determine whether Creative Safe Haven is an appropriate response (See “Assessment Points for Consideration”).

### 3. Search for a Host

After receiving an intake form, fD evaluates the request and sends out a Call for Safe Haven to the fD network. The process of finding placement for a culture worker in distress relies on the collaboration of multiple actors. Art spaces, coalitions and intermediaries who point fD to an art space that could have the capacity to host, or they forward the request to others who may be able to do so. These organizations not only help facilitate the process, but they themselves learn about Creative Safe Haven and think of ways to incorporate it within their own networks, thus spreading the tactic beyond fD.

Prior to placing a culture worker in distress in an art space, an assessment is conducted of the needs and resources available to and from both the culture worker and the art space. This is a critical part of the process to facilitate a good match and maximize the possibility of a

### Assessment Points for Consideration (regarding nominees for Creative Safe Haven)

- What countries are easily accessible (overland and by air)?
- What visas are held or countries (easily accessible) that do not require visas?
- Does the person need accompaniment that will allow them to leave a location?
- Is the person travelling alone or with family?
- Are there any language restrictions?
- What sort of equipment is required? (For example, a journalist or an artist may require a photography lab or art studio; access to musical instruments.)
- What organizational contacts are needed? (For example a culture worker seeking organizations focused on a related issue).
- What vocational skills does the person currently have that would assist their placement?
- What financial resources are available? (Does the person have money on hand; or is the nominating organization also nominating them for a distress fund known to fD?)
- What other services are still needed? (This might mean that a capital city is necessary to find the organizations or services needed if they are:
  - ◊ Legal assistance (e.g., applying for asylum or refugee status.)
  - ◊ Medical and psychological assistance (e.g., have needs related to imprisonment, trauma, torture, etc.)
  - ◊ Educational assistance (e.g., applying for academic placements.)

### Types of Distress Service Referrals Provided by fD

- Academic referral
- Award/grant nomination
- Creative Safe Haven**
- Funding referral —
- Creative Resistance Fund**
- Information services
- Introduction to peers / advisors
- Introduction to professional contacts
- Long-term safe haven referral
- Psycho-social service referral
- Referral to residency or festival
- Therapeutic weekend retreat

positive experience for everyone involved.

When fD sends out a request for a residency space, typically three to four responses are received. The responding art spaces tend to be in one of the following two categories:

- Art spaces that have downtimes during the year in which their space would otherwise be unused. This might be during a time when they have a skeleton staff in place but aren't running the full residency programme. This might mean that there is no obligation for public engagement or artistic production.
- The other variety is a residency that has an open space in their active residency period, a period that may already have a curatorial theme and/or other parameters. These parameters may be required and related to the way the residency raised money for the programme period. That is, they may have to report on how the funds were spent and even though they could include a safe haven resident, they would still need to be able to report in accordance with the specific grant requirements.

These are two generalizations of characteristics or traits similar to fD's historic placement of candidates:

- Individuals who have been threatened or harassed to the extent that they need a place to be alone for a couple months without expectations of producing work or engaging the public. They may benefit from being in the midst of an artist cohort (as a nurturing group) so it is not that they have to be alone, per se.
- The other scenario might be someone who has come through an ordeal, and really needs a platform from which speak, be creative, and advocate change for a particular issue that resulted in the ordeal experienced.

#### 4. Matching and Placement Process

There are multiple factors that determine a match between a hosting organization and a culture worker in distress in need of hosting. In addition the points previously listed, an art space will need to assess not only its capacity to host a culture worker in distress and respond to the call for Creative Safe Haven but assess the potential exchange of benefits for their art space, including its surrounding community.

#### Primary Forms of Persecution

Physical attacks  
Censorship  
Criminal charges  
Harassment  
Imprisonment  
Social/Economic Marginalization  
Threats (to self, family, neighbors, co-workers)

Areas of consideration include:

- Identifying the resources each art space could provide for the culture worker as well as resources that could be provided from elsewhere such as other human rights organizations, art networks, and local anti-censorship initiatives that can provide the resources needed (e.g. ArtsEngage Singapore – <http://sites.google.com/site/artsengagesg/>).
- Identifying the specific needs of a culture worker in distress (which can include planning for legal, health – physical and mental health – and social services. This process may also include post safe haven planning.)

#### 5. Post Placement Planning

It is important to recognize at the outset that a culture worker who has been placed in safe haven may not realistically be able to return home. Art spaces provide a critical resource for such a culture worker to assess their situation in a place of safety. At the same time, given placements are generally two weeks to six months in length, post placement planning needs to begin immediately to aid the culture worker in facing and making very



**fD Stakeholder Perspective**

*"Hello my dear friends! At present, I am in Estonia, Tartu City, everybody here is very friendly and helping me in everything. We even made a little TV show; mainly I am writing articles and working on new artistic performance's ideas. It's really great here to work with Estonian artists. I have learnt much from them and got my interesting experiences, also I am looking forward to enter the ICORN project."*

Zurab Rtveliashvili was threatened by the government for his public political speeches. Through Creative Safe Haven, Zurab received residence at Kultuuritehas Polymer in Tartu, Estonia. Zurab participated in the launch of the Tartu Culture Festival and provided a reading on Estonian TV. Although Zurab's audience did not understand the language of his poems, their structure and sound composition transcended the language barrier.

Zurab perceived his stay in Estonia as a way to continue his artistic work in a safe environment, as well as a chance to share his story and art with the local community. (<http://uudised.err.ee/index.php?06166764>).

—Zurab Rtveliashvili, poet, Republic of Georgia  
(See the section - Weaving the Pieces Together –  
A Creative Safe Haven Story)

difficult choices about his or her future life.

For culture workers, the line between their professional and personal life disappears. A threat to their livelihood often constitutes a threat to their family and friends. Creative Safe Haven makes a tremendous impact on the life of the person in distress by carefully addressing an important range of needs – even if for only a short time –

such as:

- Safe and secure environment for self expression,
- New opportunities for networking with artists working on similar issues and members of the human rights community, and
- Space to make critical life decisions.

## Stakeholder Perspective Culture Worker in Distress

**Emma Beltrán** provides important insights for the Creative Safe Haven process in the blog post she wrote "From the perspective of an artist/activist living in exile..." during the fD and New Tactics online dialogue, September 2009, "Art Spaces Hosting Activism & Strengthening Community Engagement".

An audio interview with Emma Beltrán is available on the fD website: <http://www.freedimensional.org/>

[From the perspective of an artist/activist living in exile...  
\(http://www.newtactics.org/en/node/6529/2911#comment-2911\)](http://www.newtactics.org/en/node/6529/2911#comment-2911)

*To respond to the request about wanting to hear from activists that are currently in a safe position - share their decision-making process regarding this critical question of vulnerability. I would like to share my experience; I came to Canada as a political refugee seven years ago after having been subjected to political charges, kidnapping and tortured by the Mexican National Army due to my work as a human rights defender and writer.*

*I came to Canada with the support of Amnesty International and the Kovler Centre for Survivors of Torture in Chicago, both organizations well known for their support to activists in distress. But I wasn't only an activist, I was a published poet in my country and in fact my work as a writer had a bigger impact than my activism ever did.*

*When I came to Canada my work as an artist didn't seem to matter at all. The support I was getting was because I was considered a "high profile" activist. Even though for me it is really hard to draw a line between human rights and art (I just don't understand one without the other for I am convinced that every revolution should be poetic and every poem revolutionary), all the focus was on my activism. Therefore all the organizations that provided support were human rights organizations with little or no connection to the art world.*

*Even though I was a high profile activist, university educated and well travelled, I didn't know anything about any art space/organization providing support for artist in distress when I arrived. It wasn't until a year after I arrived in Canada that PEN got in touch with me. They literally tracked me down and invited me to be part of their writers in exile network.*

*As an activist/artist engaged in the struggle for basic human rights in a country with a long history of repression, I've learnt that my best defence is to have a public profile so that it would be harder to hurt me without repercussions. So when I was forced into exile, safety was still an issue and I knew that I needed to make as much noise as possible in order to be safe...and that is how PEN Canada found me. But I would have been much safer and things would have been much easier for me, if I had known PEN Canada existed and had found them before. Instead, I had to wait for them to find me.*

*I think that the concerns of vulnerability are completely valid and it's a question every art space should ask and answer according to their own circumstances. I respect the fact that the concern isn't only about one's safety but also about how safe it would be for the people receiving your support. As some one who has gone through the process of desperately needing a safe-haven, my major concern is how we can ensure that the work that freeDimensional and its partners do, is public enough so that activist/artists needing safe havens know where to look for help when the need is the greatest?*

*So the main question for me is: How can we balance our concerns for safety with our responsibility to be accessible to all who need our support?*

*I'm aware that I'm a very privileged person and the label of "high profile" activist has granted me a lot privileges not accessible to everybody...that is why PEN Canada found me and that is also more or less why freeDimensional found me too.*



## **Engaging the Community**

### An Opportunity for Broad Impact

A unique aspect of hosting a culture worker in distress in an art space is that it brings the world closer to a given location. Often, people learn about such cases from articles in the paper and online petitions. Hosting such a culture worker presents a tremendous opportunity to share his or her story with other public intellectuals and artists as well as the surrounding community. The surrounding community may have never had a chance to talk to a culture worker who has risked so much, and whose work and testimony brings knowledge that no written article can convey. Creative Safe Haven brings this opportunity for direct human connection. Hosting organizations have organized book and poetry readings, art exhibitions, discussions and lectures, movie screenings and food festivals to create a bridge between the artist and the community.

The art space constitutes a community of its own. In art residencies, many artists use the space simultaneously. The presence of a culture worker who has experienced the pressures and dangers of censorship illuminates the global threats to freedom of thought and expression through a personal activist lens. Fellow residents (no matter what their past experiences) can be powerful support agents and resources for each other. Through building relationships and sharing stories, the culture worker in distress unveils within this safe haven how precious the gift of free expression is, and how the lack of such freedom influences their work and penetrates daily life. The artists in residence who have not experienced such distress can provide help by translating their work into a given language, familiarizing themselves with a new culture, and, importantly, provide encouragement for artists to continue working within a safe space. Relationships like these bring to light the intersection of human rights and the arts, and the urgent need to work across boundaries of various interests.

Art spaces have been highly innovative in the ways in which they build bridges to connect fD assisted activists with the broader community:

- Art exhibitions
- Art installations in public spaces
- Community discussions
- Poetry/book readings
- Engaging local schools
- Arranging dinners, making food together, serving food to others
- Creative expression of migrants' stories
- Partnerships with local lawyers and newspapers to publicize and document activists' situations and stories
- Movie screenings
- Festivals that feature art, food, music, etc.

NOTE: See "Youth Involvement", a great example of involving the community shared by the Guapamacátaro art space in Mexico on page 17.

## **Creative Safe Haven Partners**

**Freemuse** is an international organization based in Copenhagen that advocates for freedom of expression for musicians and composers worldwide. Freemuse and freeDimensional worked together to find safe haven for two artists - a young Afghan video jockey was able to find temporary placement in Norway, and a young Lebanese piano player found safe haven in an arts residence in the Czech Republic. Freemuse recognizes the lack of safe haven opportunities for musicians, and fD's wide network facilitates new connections. Freemuse was one of the first nominating organizations that fD worked with, and since then, much has improved. When Ole Reitov reflected on his experience, he emphasized the importance of organizational assessment of the kinds of assistance an art space ought to be able to provide to an artist that is coming from a severely threatening situation. (<http://www.freemuse.org/>)

**Trans Europe Halles** (TEH) is a forum that consists of 47 independent art spaces from around Europe. TEH is one of fD's partners. When a call for safe haven is sent out, TEH forwards the call to all of its partners and then communicates with fD and the art spaces in an effort to find placement. TEH was involved in facilitating the process of finding safe haven for Zurab Rveliashvili an author from Georgia with an Estonian art space, Kultuuritehas Polymer (see the case "Let's Talk about Art"). TEH has been inspired by the concept of Creative Safe Haven, and is now trying to establish an artist in residency structure among 10 to 15 of its members, that could potentially serve as an opportunity for future safe haven placements. (<http://www.teh.net/>)

**Scholars at Risk** is a network of universities that works to promote academic freedom and defend human rights of scholars. SAR identifies temporary positions of refuge for scholars in distress. SAR has a set of criteria for nominees seeking placement: they have to be scholars capable of teaching at one of the universities in the network and they have to be under severe threats. SAR receives requests for placement that do not satisfy these criteria. Thanks to the collaboration with fD, SAR has been able to successfully find other placements for individuals in distress. Working with fD has inspired SAR to broaden their network of human rights organizations and art spaces, and their ability to find placement for individuals that do not qualify to receive SAR services specifically. (<http://scholarsatrisk.nyu.edu/>)

## Weaving the Pieces Together

### A Creative Safe Haven Story

Working with a partner network, (Trans Europe Halles), fD needed a European site for a Georgian activist, poet, performance artist. (Website link: <http://www.teh.net/Home/tabid/113/Default.aspx>) TEH really came through by broadcasting the need on its private list of art spaces. The response for a placement came within a few days.

Madis Mikkos, of Estonian art space Kultuuritehas Polymer sums up the half year long story in "**Let's Talk about Art: The Case of Georgian activist & author, Zurab Rtveliashvili**".

*Through the red tape, a well known Georgian poet, performance artist and activist made it to residency in Estonia and gave a series of impressive performances in culture factories of Tartu and Tallinn. His journey was aided by numerous organisations worldwide, giving many of the involved parties a unique experience in managing the heavy wheels of bureaucracy.*

*In February 2009 a call for placement was sent to the members of Trans Europe Halles (TEH) by freeDimensional, concerning a well known Georgian activist and author. From the very beginning the case stood apart from the regular Artist in Residence affairs, as it involved a background of threat and suppression to the artist in his home country, demanding immediate action and readiness for political involvement. The many organisations promoting freedom of voice, social justice and human rights involved (including ICORN, freeDimensional and PEN-club Norway) stated the importance and urgency of the matter. The same day Kultuuritehas Polymer expressed its will to accept the refugee/ resident.*

*It took one month to talk the processes over with all the interested parties, including a close friend of the artist in the USA and of course the artist himself. We decided on the practical matters of residency, introduced the climatic (snowy) conditions and residency spaces and out went the official visa invitation. In yet another long month, of which the artist can only tell about the anxiety of waiting, our visitor arrived in the Republic of Estonia.*

*This, however turned out only to be the beginning of another series of adventures, keeping alert everyone involved. Namely, Zurab, as a resident of a non-EU country, received a short term tourist visa, not intended for the planned 3 month's stay. And with the artist residing in Tartu Culture Factory, his visa expiring in a week, we started a new application for extending his stay up to three months. This included going all the way from explaining the nature of residency to filling new forms, arranging insurances and putting together an impressive schedule of meetings, lectures and performances - because otherwise we would have been helpless in front of the invincible argument of the lady at the counter: "If he is a writer, why cannot he sit at his desk at home!"*

*Achieving the eventual victory we, among other actions, wrote a concept of artistic residence, got it signed by the chancellor of the Ministry of Culture and sent to the director of the Immigration Office. Also IPen-Club and others contributed with letters of support and on the background we felt the presence of the whole team*

*involved, keeping each other informed on the state of affairs and planning next steps.*

*Finally, to underline the grotesque nature of bureaucratic logic is a remarkable fact that since July 30, 2009 the requirement of visa invitation was waived by the Estonian Parliament - surely, the artist was the last person to suffer fully from its constraints!*

*The relief after achieving the extension was great for all and the artist could hence perform with his poetry on several artistic events both in Tartu and Tallinn (including the opening performance of Culture Factory Festival), travel to the countryside, meet with local authors and prominent cultural figures, write articles and poems and enjoying the residency the way it is intended to - getting familiar to the local culture.*

*After the two and a half months in Estonia the artist proceeded to the care of ICORN free city network for a two years residency, providing finally the safety and peace of mind needed to work in the field of literature.*

*I take again a chance to thank everyone involved for constant human and professional support and wish a peaceful and creative residency for the artist in Sweden.*

### Zurab's appearance at an Estonian folk festival

*When artists help each other, we simultaneously help create new conceptions of art in the world.*

- Zurab Rtveliashvili, poet, Republic of Georgia



## Impact on Art Spaces

### A Lessons Learned Story

Providing Creative Safe Haven is not just a noble act of good will on the side of the art space but it is a learning process that allows the organization to view itself as an actor beyond the arts world. By hosting a culture worker in distress, the art space has a chance to learn more about the threats to artistic freedom around the world, think about innovative ways to interact on broad issues and concerns in a very personal way, and connect global and local concerns.

### The Case of the Nordic Artists Center and Creative Safe Haven for Shakeb Isaar – An Evaluation of freeDimensional's 1st placement

The Nordic Artists Center (nkd) has recently started a project in collaboration with the Jakob Sande Foundation in

Dale (Jakob Sande was a loved writer and poet born and brought up in Dale) and the Red Cross Nordic United World College (RCNUWC) in Flekke. (One of nine UWC in the world, Flekke receives students from all over the world and provides them with two years of education leading to a degree of international baccalaureate – (IB).

The nkd's main activity is to run an AiR program for professionals working with visual culture.

The Jakob Sande Foundation has a program of music and literature focusing on the Norwegian "Nynorsk"-dialect.

The RCNUWC has humanitarian themes at the forefront of its agenda and organizes (among other things) weekly discussions called "The World Today", discussing conflicts in different parts of the world.

The nkd contacted freeDimensional in order to receive writers in exile seeking safe haven for a limited period of time through its network.

The nkd's expectations were to welcome into our small society a professional able to raise some important issues for discussion related to his/her background, work and experiences.

In our conversations with freeDimensional we expressed a desire to receive our first guest in the autumn of 2006 to coincide with the Jakob Sande foundation's celebration of the 100th anniversary of Jakob Sande with happenings throughout the year, one of them being a three day festival of music and prose organized in collaboration with RCNUWC and scheduled for the end of October.

freeDimensional responded in a very positive way and proposed a candidate connected to Freemuse in Denmark, a young music journalist from Afghanistan living in exile in Sweden. As the festival in October "Home and Homelessness" was organized for young people we decided to invite him to come for three months even though our initial wish was to host a writer.

In our communication with freeDimensional we stated very clearly that we did not have the capacity to support our guest financially or in case of illness or other unpredictable problems, but he would get a free place to live and work and an invitation to take part in excursions and other activities with the artists. The artists staying at the centre work independently but get assistance to come into contact with whoever they might desire in the local community/region/nationally to pursue their own projects. We were prepared to provide this kind of support to our guest in exile but nothing further than this.

Shakeb Isaar proved to be a very intelligent and active young man; he came easily in contact with the other artists and charmed us all with his polite manners and witty remarks. He was very keen to get better acquainted with the Norwegian people and their culture, which of course were new to him.

But he had a big problem. The financial aid he had been receiving in Sweden was not available to him while staying in Norway. Freemuse had provided him with some financial aid and paid his trip to Norway but he did not have

enough money to support himself, as Norway is rather expensive for food and other necessities. (In correspondence with Freemuse later, it became apparent that they were under the impression that the centre would provide for meals.) He was also expecting more planned activities for him during his stay and was rather frustrated about not being able to "fill his days." He worked on making weekly TV-reports for a former employer in Afghanistan and was on several occasions assisted by a European volunteer working at the centre.

He took active part in all the activities at the center, artists' talks, open days, excursions, workshops and other social gatherings. He gave a talk at the RCNUWC and participated in a public discussion at the nkd on freedom of expression led by a philosophy teacher from RCNUWC.

This was of course in many ways totally new for all of us and we did not have much time to prepare; so there are some lessons to be learned from this experience.

First of all: It is very important that people in exile do not have to have the additional worries of fulfilling their subsistence needs.

Secondly: People in this position may need professional help for psychological or social problems, which a centre like the nkd cannot provide for.

Thirdly: Finding the right person for a residency such as this needs careful evaluation of many different factors. This process takes time and energy, which all parties need to be devoted to.

Fourthly: Creative people in exile need more assistance than others [artist residents] to be able to function professionally in new surroundings.

Fifthly: Possibly a more structured relationship between the sender/senders and the host should be established with some routine tasks.

Having said all this I must add that our communication with freeDimensional and Freemuse has been very pleasant and we have had open discussions about this first experience of working together.

We look forward to continuing our collaboration for a worthy cause.

*Historically, those intent on eliminating opposition and suppressing dissent have made a priority of quickly eliminating creators and thinkers from their midsts...if you scratch the surface of a human disaster you will find creators responding to the most difficult of circumstances, making art to live, to eat, to kindle the human spirit, to bring peace or to resolve conflict.*

- Bill Cleveland, *Art and Upheaval*, 2008

## **Considerations for Art Spaces**

### **Providing Creative Safe Haven for Culture Worker in Distress**

The following information provides some general guides that organizations can use to focus on their capacity and desire to host. Examples of these areas of assistance and some possible solutions to issues are provided on the following page.

Type of Assistance	Capacity Assessment Question
1. Time duration of placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● How long a time period is the person requesting?</li><li>● For how long can an organization provide a placement?</li><li>● Does the organization have any capacity to facilitate the next steps (post placement planning)?</li></ul>
2. Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Does the host have the resources to provide accommodation for the agreed period of time?</li><li>● Who else can be engaged to share this responsibility?</li></ul>
3. Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● How can the host prepare to help culture workers get a visa to enter their country?</li><li>● Are there legal services organizations that could provide assistance for next steps?</li></ul>
4. Health Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Can the host provide health care insurance?</li><li>● Are there other options for providing for health care and potential health emergencies?</li></ul>
5. Mental Health Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● What has the culture worker experienced?</li><li>● What mental health services might they need?</li><li>● What kind of community support and /or expectations will be present during the placement?</li><li>● Will the person be able to maintain contact with family / home country / or home community while living in the host country?</li></ul>
6. Artist's form of expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● What is the culture worker's medium of expression?</li><li>● Does our art space have the capacity and can it support the continuity of the culture worker's work?</li></ul>
7. Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● What is the culture worker's native language?</li><li>● Do they work in their native language? If so, how can we support them?</li><li>● Does the culture worker have sufficient proficiency in a language that is used in the art space and surrounding community to be able to avail him or herself of sufficient support and relationship opportunities?</li></ul>
8. Other factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Does the culture worker have any additional needs?</li><li>● Does the culture worker have family concerns?</li><li>● Does the culture worker's family need a place to live?</li></ul>
9. Art Space Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● What requirements or constraints does the art space have for the period of safe haven being requested?</li><li>● What experience, talents or characteristics could assist the art space at this time?</li><li>● In what ways could hosting a culture worker in distress benefit the art space?</li></ul>
10. Community Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● What are the current needs in the broader community of the art space that could be served through this hosting experience?</li></ul>

## Considerations for Art Spaces: Examples / Possible Solutions

1. **Time duration of placement:** By understanding that a culture worker in distress may not be able to return home after their temporary placement in Creative Safe Haven, the Art Space can begin to raise this issue for the culture worker to help think about and process the current situation and future options.
2. **Financial:** Engaging human rights organizations, art and free expression funders, finding organizations specific to the area that the artist is active in (e.g., music) or civic and NGO organizations engaged in the cultural worker's region; and academic institutions.
3. **Legal:** Utilize networks of human rights organizations that are skilled in the process and regularly perform background checks. *Pro-bono* legal service organizations; particularly helpful are those that specialize in asylum law.
4. **Health care:** Small grants or donations to provide the culture worker with health care insurance. Building relationships with health practitioners in the local community is one way to cover these expenses. For example, an artist that was hosted by a Brazilian art space received free dental insurance and an Uzbek national hosted in Spain received medical care for a knee injury.
5. **Mental health support:** The culture worker may have experienced trauma and been exposed to a variety of severe stressors. In addition, transitioning from one culture to another presents a variety of challenges. Being in proximity to and having access to appropriate mental health services may be crucial for many. Furthermore, a supportive social environment can help with adaptation to a new culture. Building relationships with torture treatment centers, mental health organizations, and religious communities can help to provide this additional support.
6. **Artist's form of expression:** When the opportunity to engage with other culture workers working on similar issues is limited, the art space can facilitate interventions that engage artists from multiple media and disciplines. It is important to consider that not being able to cater to the culture worker's medium may limit continuation of work. Lesson learned: An avant garde musician and women's rights activist was placed at a conservatory that focuses on classical music. Although the placement was welcoming, the musician was not able to find a community of support.
7. **Language:** When art spaces host multiple culture workers at the same time, there is potential to build a community that helps the activist translate some work into a local language or provide opportunities to support writing in the artist's own language. Various options exist for communication among the culture worker, the art space and the community. The culture worker can build bilingual partnerships with those who study their language, or even organize performances in their own language and share it with the community. Additional connections can be encouraged with other people from the culture worker's home country who may be residing in the host community.
8. **Other factors:** One of the unique aspects of Creative Safe Haven has been the opportunity to customize the experience based on the unique situation and needs of both the culture worker in distress as well as the art space. One art space was able to partner with an academic institution to provide housing for the culture worker's family while the artist took advantage of the residency in the art space community. (See example: "From the Art Space Perspective – Ledig House & Pierre Mumbere Mjjobma")
9. **Art space needs:** Others in the artist residency have an opportunity to broaden their perspective on issues such as censorship, human rights, and the costs of expression to artists around the world. By hosting culture workers in distress there may be an opportunity for highlighting the mission and work of the art space to a broader constituency – locally, nationally and internationally.
10. **Community needs:** The surrounding community has a chance to meet with a culture worker in distress and listen to stories and potentially to engage in action on behalf of the culture worker's own situation or more generally on issues of censorship and human rights.

### Youth involvement

(<http://www.newtactics.org/en/node/6529/2919#comment-2919>)

fD and New Tactics partnered for an online dialogue featuring 'Art Spaces Hosting Activism & Strengthening Community Engagement'. Alicia Marván (Mexico) shared her experience of engaging the youth and their parents from a nearby school.

Yes! Engaging the youth is one of my favorite activities at [Guapamacátaro](#), actually, and kids just can't get enough of being around the resident artists!

It probably helps that their school is right across the road, so they're always on the ball of what we're up to. First they just showed up at all times of the day, so I decided to structure their involvement a little more. We announced at the beginning of the residency that they are welcome to come every day after school for 2 hours, dedicated to a mix of workshops imparted by the artists (each day a different topic.) Subjects have included: drawing, juggling, English, composting, gardening, nail painting, dance, theater, and recycling, etc.

It's been a great way for the visiting artists to get to know the community and surroundings (The kids are excellent tour guides!) This engagement, as well, keeps them going to school, and brings their parents in.

- Alicia Marván

artist / activist / residency manager



## **Challenges**

There have been a number of issues that have been raised by the network of people and organizations involved in the Creative Safe Haven process. Four challenges were identified:

### **Creative Safe Haven is a Short-term Solution in Urgent Situations**

It does not resolve the underlying problem that culture workers in distress are threatened in their home communities because of the work they are doing. The scale and time of CSH is well balanced to help those in need, but it does not create a structure that fosters developments of free expression in the culture worker's homeland.

The difficult choices facing a culture worker in distress take time, planning, and resources that cannot be provided by Creative Safe Haven. The individual will still need to address the broader questions for a sustainable solution.

### **The Process is "Messy"**

While this flexibility is generally a positive thing because fD and the network can stay flexible and pay attention to each case based on the individuals needs. However, it is a challenge to transfer the process in concrete terms.

### **The Need for Additional Support Services**

It is important to recognize the limitations of this tactic. Knowing when a referral is appropriate and the limits of what fD and the network can do is a challenge. One such limited area is mental health support. This is an important area that needs to be explored to provide the most support possible to culture workers in distress , many of whom have experienced significant trauma in their lives.

### **Closing a case**

It can be difficult to know when a case is actually closed. There is not always a clear line where fD's Distress Services are ended. Nonetheless, fD works to understand an individual's needs and acknowledge when the activist's needs fall outside the unique services fD is able to provide.

## **Successes**

Since launching fD's Distress Services and the Creative Safe Haven model in 2005, the support network has been drawn upon in 60 cases over the past four years to help activist artists, journalists, musicians, writers, theatre directors, and community organizers from more than 30 countries. As of early 2010 the freeDimensional network consists of over 300 affiliated art spaces in 60 countries. fD has regional hubs in São Paulo, Cairo, New York City, Berlin, and at a multi-site residency in India. These art spaces are located around the world in large cities and in small communities with outreach and connections to many more contacts and sites through their partners.

### **How can art spaces support activists in distress?**

(<http://www.newtactics.org/en/node/6529/2958#comment-2958>)

[NOTE: New Tactics in Human Rights and freeDimensional (fD) partnered for an on-line dialogue featuring 'Art Spaces Hosting Activism & Strengthening Community Engagement'. Gabriela De Luca, fD International Fellow, shared this insightful information in her posting during the dialogue.]

Usually activists and culture workers who look for placement services are in a very delicate situation and may need legal advice (to ask for political asylum the host country or just get their VISA permit in order), psychological therapy, health treatment, financial support, or other types of assistance.

What a host art space can do to help is be prepared for such needs. Investigate about resources in your country or region that might be useful – strengthen ties with human rights organizations.

### **Examples from São Paulo, Brazil:**

For legal advice, the Public Defense Attorney Office in São Paulo offers free legal services to any person who demonstrates insufficient financial capacity to pay for a lawyer – these services are open to everyone (illegal immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees) and they have a specific Human Rights and Public Interest Department. Some NGOs or Law Firms with Pro Bono departments can also offer free legal services.

For psychological therapy, the universities that have Schools of Psychology often have clinics where senior students and professors provide free therapy services (this happens at Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo and at University of São Paulo). [Editors note: There may also be torture treatment programs that can provide a wide variety of mental health and referral services. The International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) provides a listing of centers around the world. (<http://www.irct.org/>).

For health treatments, I would also suggest looking into universities with Medical Schools that have free clinics. Specifically for Brazil though, the Public Health System (SUS) is open to everyone, which is actually a major reason to attract migration flows from Latin America to Brazil (Brazilian legislation authorizes temporary visas for people solely based on their need of health treatment).

For financial support, there are good resources to have in mind and suggest when your art space is in a position to receive an activist or culture worker with such need. I would suggest researching online for international organizations that offer thematic resources. For example: Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights (<http://www.urgentactionfund.org/>), Open Society grants, scholarships and fellowships (<http://www.soros.org/>), The Rory Peck Trust (<http://www.rorypecktrust.org/>), Front Line Defenders Protection of Human Rights Defenders Small Grants and Fellowships (<http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/front-line-small-grants-and-fellowships>), among others. Amnesty International keeps a particularly extensive and up-to- date list of financial resources for human rights practitioners: (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/human-rights-defenders/resources/financial-resources>)

As a result, fD has access to hundreds of months of surplus accommodation and meeting space throughout its network. By cataloguing this resource, which can be monetized at a substantial amount, fD seeks funding from supportive foundations, businesses, and individuals to professionally implement its Creative Safe Haven and related services. Based on this business model, freeDimensional was a semi-finalist in the 2006 Global Social Venture Competition, a finalist in the 2006 Yale 50K Competition and received first place in the 2007 Working for Good Business Plan Competition. fD was featured in a consultancy clinic at the 2008 Skoll World Forum on Social Entrepreneurship and was one of twelve networks selected to participate in Winter Camp organized by the Institute of Network Cultures in March 2009.

fD has received significant press coverage since its beginning in 2005, including articles in the New York Times, Santa Fe New Mexican, and Walfadjri (Senegal) newspapers, as well as books such as the London School of Economics Global Civil Society Yearbook, the Commonwealth Foundation's 'Putting Culture First', brandeins Wissen's 'Where Does Responsibility Start?' and the forthcoming Sage publication, 'Cultural Expression, Creativity and Innovation'. fD has been featured in Bidoun, Contemporary Practices, and Elan magazines as well as the Voice of America (VOA), West African Democracy Radio, WBAI (New York), Santa Fe Radio Café and SUD Quotidian radio interviews. The Breuninger Stiftung provides training support and technical assistance to fD each summer by hosting the network on its Wasan Island conference facility in Canada. Similarly, fD has received three years of capacity-building support from The Fledgling Fund; travel grants from the Ford Foundation; and new funding from Sigrid Rausing Trust and Freedom to Create. fD is currently hosted by the Flux Factory in New York City (2010).

## Transferability

### Using Vacant / Available Space - fD's Model of a Network in Residence

The core organization of freeDimensional has applied the idea of using surplus space to its own operations from the beginning. When fD was founded in New York City in 2005, its offices were located in available space at the Pratt Center for Community Development and the Magnolia Tree Earth Center in 2007 and 2008 while using residency space at the Carlton Arms. After three years of informal collaboration, The Flux Factory in Queens became the official NYC hub and will host the fD office.

In order to stay abreast of global issues and the suppression of independent voices, fD established four more regional hubs in São Paulo, Cairo, Berlin, and at a multi-site residency in India. These offices provide on-the-ground support for local initiatives that link partner centers to activists and human rights organizations. The

network-in-residence approach is an office rotation strategy to build ownership and horizontally distribute decision-making across the network. Office rotation is determined during the annual meeting when network members make plans for the following year, which includes activities of the regional hubs and the hosting of fD's administrative functions.

The idea that a vacant or surplus space can be utilized to further human rights efforts lies at the core of Creative Safe Haven. At present, civil society organizations are accustomed to typical office settings, and at times overlook other space that may be available in their community. By inquiring about vacant spaces in their area, human rights practitioners and community organizations can build valuable partnerships that allow access to and use of new space. This practice has a primary benefit of expanding their work from the office to the community.

An organization's staff can brainstorm and inquire about temporary or recurring vacancies and match them with annual needs for space. For example, many classrooms in elementary and middle schools may be available for use during summer vacations. How about using local classrooms to hold a small-scale conference on human rights issues as opposed to spending scarce resources on renting a conference space? In addition, a school setting, unlike the usual conference room, lessens the formal feel of many meetings and provides a friendlier atmosphere in the community. Such partnerships can be a one-time occurrence (such as finding a convenient location for a meeting) or lead to longer collaborations, where local partners regularly offer their space for a specific purpose (annual event, etc.). Long-term collaborations, especially, bring tremendous potential for creating a wider support base for human rights-related work.

Organizations in a wide variety of contexts and with varying needs may find application of this creative model of organizational operation to their benefit, not only in times of scarce resources but as a way of implementing their mission. In fact, freeDimensional was inspired by the work of progressive artist residencies such as hosting of displaced artists from New York City after 9/11 and from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina at Santa Fe

### fD Director recalls a challenging case

*The Rory Peck Foundation, a human rights organisation for freelance journalists, asked freeDimensional whether we could offer a safe haven to the journalist Lamin Fatty. He was being persecuted for his reports on the former Minister of the Interior in Gambia, who was alleged to be involved in plans for a coup. His publications in the Gambian newspaper The Independent got him into serious trouble, including criminal charges for publishing false information. Thanks to our network, we were quickly able to offer refuge on Gorée Island, near the Senegalese capital, Dakar.*

—Todd Lester, fD

Source: <http://www.powerofculture.nl/en/current/2009/january/free-dimensional>

<http://www.cpj.org/2008/02/attacks-on-the-press-2007-the-gambia.php>

Art Institute ([www.sfai.org](http://www.sfai.org)) in New Mexico as well as examples from the field such as the Amani Trust in Zimbabwe, La Strada International European Network Against Trafficking in Human Beings, UNICEF's experiences with safe zones in Somalia, the Human Rights House Network, and the World Organization Against Torture's Distress Funding (to re-locate families of human rights defenders from Sierra Leone.)

### **Creative Partnerships - Bridging the Arts and Human Rights Communities**

Creative Safe Haven initiative presents fD's groundbreaking effort to bridge the human rights and arts communities that have traditionally worked separately. By proposing that an art space can become safe haven for oppressed activists, fD forms an important bridge between the two communities, skillfully illuminating common goals – to protect the right to freedom of thought and expression in a safe environment. The concept of bridging two separate communities (arts and human rights) and therefore seeing art spaces as civic spaces can be achieved through a range of initiatives. For example, the Guapamacátaro Arts Residency in Mexico engages artists and the local community to build new connections and changes the perception of artists in residencies as isolated. Each summer, Guapamacátaro hosts a group of artists from around the world in a three-week long program. Alicia Marvan, program director, sees food as a great opportunity to engage artists in the local community. By organizing lunches with local school children, the residency becomes more accessible and inviting to the locals, and vice versa. (See example: Youth involvement)

fD members provide safe haven for oppressed culture workers in their residency apartments; but they also offer meeting rooms to community organizers who bring important local issues to light; and introduce new ideas to the public through bold exhibitions and inclusive educational programs. Although art spaces are often portrayed with a hint of whimsy, where talented individuals gather to produce magnificent works of art others can admire, this popular understanding of an art space neglects the tremendous role that art spaces around the world play in opening civil society space. A civic space can be defined both as the physical location where members of civil society can gather to discuss pressing issues and make progress, but more importantly as a forum for community building. Such a space holds powerful potential for bringing together artists, local activists and the broader community. In short, the art space goes beyond the practical.

For example, imagine organizing a meeting for a non-violent protest in your town. You could do that in

your organization's office or conference room. Or you could build a partnership with a local art space, and hold your meeting in a space where ideas are constantly flowing, where people don't just come and go, but can meet new people, see and feel the creative space and build their activism together. The mood or atmosphere in the art space can harness the human energy that has been invested in the space, and how much more powerful when a person who has risked so much for their commitment to creative expression is present in that space.

The idea of Creative Safe Haven carries within it numerous tactical ideas that can be used to advance the work of human rights practitioners at any level. This initiative not only allows human rights practitioners worldwide to nominate oppressed activists but invites them to utilize some of the key ideas embedded in this tactic into their own work. fD's Distress Services brings inspiring elements of strategic collaboration that can be implemented in many projects.

### **Beyond Art Spaces – Using Surplus Resources**

The idea fD developed of using available space can be extended to explore other ways of using available or surplus resources.

**United Kingdom:** A community centre partnered with a shopping centre in Birmingham in the United Kingdom, to provide a program in the summer for inner city youth to develop art skills. Youth that showed promise and wanted to develop skills in the arts – visual arts, filmmaking, journalism, etc. – would have an opportunity for a fast-track into a secondary school option. The allowed space in the shopping centre was empty (vacant) shops where the youth put their work in the windows for public viewing. It provided the community centre with the required space and it converted empty space into pleasing exhibits and it brought additional people into the retail areas of the shopping mall.

**Norway:** During the winter in Stavanger, a film festival with human rights themes takes place using available space – an outdoor wall of snow. At about 4:00 p.m. in the afternoon when it is already dark, the films are screened on a wall of white snow. People dress very warmly and watch the films together as a community.

**South Africa:** In Cape Town, the Cape Creative Exhibition was the brainchild of Patrick Schofield and the Indalo Project. The multi-disciplinary exhibition showcased the creative talent of Cape Town during the 2010 FIFA World Cup and brought together selected ranges of craft, design, fine art, film and performing arts in a refurbished empty building. The Indalo Project is an organization that aims to develop and showcase local design in all its elements. To further that purpose, Mr. Schofield was in conversation with the owner of 37 Main Road to utilize his building for a creative space - a building that would have to be cleaned or knocked down because it was on the "Golden Mile" for the 2010 FIFA World Cup games.

#### **Art Spaces that have provided Creative Safe Haven**

- Kultuuritehas Polymer, Estonia
- Ledig House, USA
- Nordic Artists Center, Norway
- Milkwood International Art Center, Czech Republic
- Montalvo Arts Center, USA
- Atelier Moustafa Dime, Senegal
- Bilbao Arte, Spain

Meanwhile, Mr. Schofield had also been in contact with Nombelelo Mkefa, City of Cape Town's Tourism Department, to discuss the creative centre and inquire about funding to assist in creating a temporary creative exhibition in the vacant building. The result was an exciting private-public partnership. The City of Cape Town's Tourism Department provided about \$15,500 (US) for renovations of the building and additional funds for running the exhibition. Many commercial organizations such as Superior Vision and Econo-loo sponsored equipment, without which Cape Creative Exhibition would not have been as successful. Thessa Bos and Chantal Louw, co-founders of The Fringe Arts, have experience with using available space. They have a core project that is an art and design collective that does not have a permanent store anywhere, but intentionally "pop-up" in empty spaces or as part of exhibitions. In just five weeks they brought together, organized the various artists/organizations and served as curators for the exhibition itself. Nicci Drezwicki of DRZ Architects was the person behind the scene who did the actual renovation to turn the building from dereliction into dreams.

The results of transforming surplus space to showcase artistic expression are impressive. In addition to a total of 82 craft producers of handmade Western Cape craft and design – in the five weeks it was open from June to 18 July 2010, the Cape Creative Exhibition hosted over 45 performances, workshops and functions. Excluding the number of people who attended the performances and functions, the Cape Creative Exhibition was visited by over 1,500 people, 80 percent of whom were international visitors. Ms. Bos stated, "What was special was that it was the first time that a range of creative professionals from the performing arts, the visual arts and other sectors came together in one building to showcase what they are about and to profile the level of organization that exists in the creative industry in the Western Cape. The exhibition has shown that there is most definitely scope for a repeat of this collaboration or to do it on a more permanent basis."

<http://www.creativecapetown.net/cape-creative-exhibition-brings-creative-professionals-together/>

<http://indaloproject.co.za/news/?p=127>

<http://www.thefringearts.co.za>

**Czech Republic:** Some spaces are vacant at a particular time of year or on a regular basis. For example, many classrooms are left unused during the summer when school is not in session. In Chotebor, Czech Republic, a local science fiction & fantasy fan club organizes an annual convergence of sci-fi fans. Every year, the organization partners with local schools and utilizes their space for various purposes, such as accommodation, or lecture space. It is important to note, that without the support of temporarily vacant spaces, the annual festivals would not be able to host such a large number of participants (between 400 and 1,200). Therefore, the ability to partner with temporarily available spaces makes it possible to bring relatively large scale events beyond urban areas.

**Turkey:** Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR) New Ways in Turkey partnered with the government to access both community centres and the social workers who run them to provide community women with an understanding of their rights and support to use them. For more information about this example see the tactical notebook, "The Human Rights Education Program for Women (HREP): Utilizing state resources to promote women's human rights in Turkey". [http://www.newtactics.org/sites/newtactics.org/files/Ercvik\\_Amado\\_HREP\\_update2007.pdf](http://www.newtactics.org/sites/newtactics.org/files/Ercvik_Amado_HREP_update2007.pdf)

## Afterword

This Tactical Notebook was finalized by freeDimensional and New Tactics in Human Rights during a weeklong meeting entitled "Creative Resistance – An Intersecting Networks Approach" from 10 to 15 July, 2010 on Wasan Island ([www.wasan-island.de](http://www.wasan-island.de)). As an additional example of transferability, the Creative Resistance meeting saw the formation of a coalition by 20 international associations (based in Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America and the USA) concerned with the broader issues of arts, human rights, and social justice — very aptly named the International Coalition for Arts, Human Rights, and Social Justice. Such a meeting of minds produced complementary tactics to Creative Safe Haven, and will likely instigate modifications, joining of forces, and collaboration on shared interests. Participants included representatives from these organizations (in alphabetical order):

- African Arts Institute
- artdialog
- Arterial Network
- Article 19
- Art Moves Africa
- Arts Action Research
- Arts & Democracy Project
- Arts Network Asia
- Breuninger Stiftung
- Creative Resistance Fund
- Cultural Radius
- freeDimensional
- FREEMUSE
- International Cities of Refuge Network
- International Coalition of Sites of Conscience
- International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts (IETM)
- New Tactics in Human Rights
- Red Latinoamericana de Arte y Transformación Social
- Res Artis
- The Upgrade
- Trans Europe Halles
- Triangle Arts Trust
- Young Arab Theatre Fund



International Coalition for  
Arts, Human Rights,  
and Social Justice  
[www.artsrightsjustice.net](http://www.artsrightsjustice.net)

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