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Building the Matrix

A Case Study in Adaptive Framework Design

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Abstract

This case study reveals how the CIRCULAR matrix framework becomes a powerful tool for artistic research and civic network building. Taking the Småland Triennial 2026's evocative theme "ORO -- Art, preparedness and resistance" as a starting point, it traces the development of a 12-field matrix that maps the intersections of thematic dimensions with methodological approaches. Through careful interpretation and the establishment of selection criteria, we demonstrate how minimal guidance can be expanded into a comprehensive framework populated with 36 artistic projects that illustrate the matrix's potential.

As a practical companion to the CIRCULAR Field Guide, this document shows how the matrix adapts to real-world conditions, particularly when institutional direction is sparse. It proves that building collaborative networks doesn't require extensive resources -- just creative vision and methodological clarity. The interpretations and examples presented are deliberate methodological choices that demonstrate the matrix's flexibility: it provides essential structure while leaving space for innovation, making it equally valuable for grassroots initiatives and established institutions.

By illustrating how sparse information transforms into actionable frameworks, this case study empowers communities to develop their own networks that can address complex ecological and social challenges through interdisciplinary collaboration.

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Introduction

When the Småland Triennial released its theme for 2026 -- "ORO -- Art, preparedness and resistance" -- they provided minimal guidance beyond these three evocative words. While some might see this sparsity as a limitation, it offered an ideal opportunity to demonstrate how the CIRCULAR matrix adapts to varying levels of institutional direction. What follows is a narrative account of transforming minimal information into a comprehensive analytical framework, showing how the matrix can be constructed under real-world conditions.

This document serves as a practical companion to the CIRCULAR Field Guide, offering a case study of matrix development. It serves purely illustrative purposes. The interpretations, selection criteria, and artistic examples presented here reflect methodological choices rather than personal preferences or endorsements. They demonstrate one possible pathway through which sparse institutional guidance can be expanded into a functional matrix structure.

Starting with Minimal Information

The journey began with a single line: "ORO -- Art, preparedness and resistance." Unlike many institutional open calls that provide extensive curatorial statements and selection criteria, the Småland Triennial offered something more akin to a haiku -- brief, suggestive, and open to interpretation.

This minimal approach mirrors a common scenario. Many organisations, especially those new to collaborative frameworks or operating with limited resources, provide sparse guidance. The matrix approach treats this not as a deficiency but as an invitation to co-create meaning.

Developing the Framework

The process of building a matrix from minimal information involves several key steps. Each step builds upon the previous one, transforming abstract concepts into practical structures.

1. Interpreting Themes

The first task involved unpacking "ORO -- Art, preparedness and resistance" into workable dimensions. Through careful consideration of contemporary contexts and regional concerns, three thematic dimensions emerged:

- **Societal Anxiety** -- collective uncertainties defining our current moment
- **Preparedness** -- how communities ready themselves for unknown futures
- **Resistance** -- opposition to harmful systems and creation of alternatives

While three themes worked well for this case, the matrix framework can accommodate more dimensions when required, creating larger matrices that remain manageable and meaningful.

2. Applying Methodological Structure

The four methodological approaches remained consistent with CIRCULAR's core framework:

- Local Community Engagement
- Knowledge-Spreading Objectives
- Local Collaboration
- Public Programmes

These intersected with the three themes to create twelve distinct fields, each requiring interpretation and population with relevant examples.

3. Establishing Selection Criteria

With no explicit criteria provided, it became necessary to develop principles for identifying relevant artistic practices. These include:

- Relevance to matrix intersection
- Artistic quality and recognition
- Demonstrable impact
- Methodological diversity
- Geographic and cultural diversity
- Contemporary relevance

These criteria emerged organically from the need to populate the matrix meaningfully, demonstrating how the framework guides the development of evaluation standards.

Through these three developmental steps, we transformed minimal guidance into a robust analytical framework, ready for practical application.

The Matrix in Practice

What follows is the comprehensive matrix analysis that resulted from this process, demonstrating how minimal institutional guidance can be transformed into a detailed analytical tool. Each of the twelve fields includes specific artistic examples selected according to the developed criteria, showing how abstract concepts translate into concrete references for artistic practice.

Comprehensive Matrix Analysis: "ORO -- Art, preparedness and resistance"

Selection Criteria

The following criteria guided our selection of artistic examples across all matrix fields. They ensure consistency while allowing for diverse interpretations of each intersection.

Core Selection Criteria Applied Across Categories:

1. **Relevance to Matrix Intersection:** Each example specifically demonstrates the intersection between the theme component and focus area
2. **Artistic Quality and Recognition:** Works by established artists/collectives with recognised contributions to socially engaged art
3. **Demonstrable Impact:** Projects with documented outcomes, community effects, or institutional changes
4. **Methodological Diversity:** Examples showcasing different approaches to artistic practice
5. **Geographic and Cultural Diversity:** Projects representing various countries and cultural contexts
6. **Contemporary Relevance:** Primarily projects from the past decade or with ongoing iterations

Category-Specific Selection Criteria:

- **Societal Anxiety:** Projects addressing collective uncertainties; making invisible anxieties visible; transforming abstract threats into tangible experiences
- **Preparedness:** Projects building community capacity; developing practical skills/resources; rehearsing potential futures
- **Resistance:** Projects challenging established power structures; creating alternatives to dominant systems; empowering collective action
- **Community Engagement:** Projects with substantive roles for non-artist participants; transforming passive audiences into active collaborators
- **Knowledge-Spreading:** Projects with educational dimensions; translating complex information into accessible forms
- **Local Collaboration:** Projects involving formal partnerships with non-art organisations; leveraging existing community networks
- **Public Programmes:** Projects extending beyond singular events; offering structured engagement opportunities over time

Matrix Field Explorations

The following twelve fields present the results of our matrix analysis. Each field demonstrates how a specific thematic dimension intersects with a methodological approach, illustrated through three carefully selected examples that reveal the framework's practical applications.

1. Societal Anxiety / Local Community Engagement

How can we address collective anxieties through active community involvement?

Contemporary artists increasingly recognise that effectively addressing societal anxieties requires moving beyond passive viewing experiences to create work that actively engages local communities as participants and co-creators.

Examples:

1. **Olafur Eliasson's "Little Sun Project"** responds to energy insecurity by distributing solar lamps in off-grid communities while organising workshops where locals share stories and create artwork about their relationship with energy. This process makes invisible infrastructure visible and empowers communities through sustainable technology.
2. **Tania Bruguera's "Immigrant Movement International"** created a community space in Queens, New York functioning simultaneously as art project and community resource centre. Local immigrants actively participate in designing services, educational workshops, and advocacy initiatives that address anxieties surrounding migration, documentation, and belonging.
3. **Jeanne van Heeswijk's "Philadelphia Assembled" (2017-2019)** directly confronts economic and social instability through a city-wide network of community collaborations. The project engaged over 150 collaborators across Philadelphia to map anxieties about gentrification, incarceration, and economic displacement, creating platforms for residents to envision alternatives through storytelling, cooking, and community organising.

2. Societal Anxiety / Knowledge-Spreading Objectives

How can art communicate and expand understanding of our collective uncertainties?

Effective knowledge-spreading art doesn't merely represent anxiety but creates frameworks for understanding its systemic roots and potential responses.

Examples:

1. **HeHe's "Nuage Vert" (Green Cloud)** projects green light onto the vapour emissions of a power plant, making energy consumption visible to an entire community. The project's extensive public programming translated abstract climate concerns into tangible daily energy decisions, helping communities visualise their collective environmental impact.
2. **Ursula Biemann's "Deep Weather" (2013)** directly addresses societal anxiety through visual essays that connect extractive industries in Alberta with climate refugees in Bangladesh. The work fulfils its knowledge-spreading focus through careful translation of complex climate relationships, making visible the interconnections between fossil fuel extraction and climate vulnerability.
3. **The Centre for Land Use Interpretation** documents how land is utilised across America through exhibitions, field excursions, and digital archives that reveal the hidden infrastructure shaping daily life. Their work transforms abstract anxieties about development and environmental change into concrete, educational experiences.

3. Societal Anxiety / Local Collaboration

How can partnerships with local entities help process and address community uncertainties?

Local organisations often already work at the frontlines of societal challenges; artists can amplify this work through strategic collaborations.

Examples:

1. **Fernando García-Dory's "INLAND" project** comprehensively addresses rural precarity through an extensive network of collaborations with farmers, shepherds, and rural communities across Europe. It demonstrates sustained local partnerships that address the existential uncertainty of rural disappearance while creating new economic and cultural models for agricultural communities.
2. **Mel Chin's "Operation Paydirt/Fundred Dollar Bill Project"** addresses environmental toxicity concerns by partnering with schools, health departments, and scientists to raise awareness about lead poisoning. Children create "Fundred" dollar bills that form a collective artwork advocating for soil remediation.
3. **Lucy + Jorge Orta's "70 x 7 The Meal"** addresses social fragmentation by collaborating with local government, food producers, and community organisations to create communal meals. Custom tableware becomes both

art object and catalyst for conversations about local food systems and social cohesion.

4. Societal Anxiety / Public Programmes

How can supplementary activities extend the reach and impact of art addressing societal uncertainties?

Public programmes can transform abstract anxieties into concrete discussions and actions through structured engagement opportunities.

Examples:

1. **Rimini Protokoll's "100% City" series** creates performances with 100 citizens statistically representing a city's demographic composition. The extensive workshops, public forums, and performances directly address anxiety about representation and belonging through sustained engagement, making abstract demographic data visibly human.
2. **Ellie Harrison's "The Glasgow Effect" (2016)** addressed economic and environmental uncertainty through a year-long project restricting herself to Glasgow's city limits. The project included an extensive public programme of discussions, workshops, and events examining mobility, sustainability, and local economics, translating personal restriction into collective reflection.
3. **The Yes Men's "The Yes Men Fix the World"** includes film screenings, activist training workshops, and public interventions that transform their media tactics into practical tools for addressing corporate power and institutional accountability.

5. Preparedness / Local Community Engagement

How can art help communities prepare for uncertain futures through active involvement?

Art can create experiences that build adaptive capacity and rehearse possible futures through participatory frameworks.

Examples:

1. **Carolina Caycedo's "Be Dammed" (2012-ongoing)** offers a comprehensive community engagement model through its work with indigenous and rural communities affected by dam construction. The project actively builds preparedness through community mapping, oral history gathering, and knowledge exchange about water sovereignty, helping communities document and defend their relationships with rivers.

2. **Pedro Reyes' "Palas por Pistolas" (Shovels for Guns)** transformed surrendered weapons into gardening tools, then engaged community members in planting trees. This created a tangible practice of transforming violence into regeneration while building community resilience through collective action.
3. **WochenKlausur's community-based interventions** work with residents to design and implement solutions to local problems, from healthcare for the homeless to violence reduction. Their methodology builds community capacity to address challenges through collaborative problem-solving and resource mobilisation.

6. Preparedness / Knowledge-Spreading Objectives

How can art educate communities about preparation for future challenges?

Knowledge-based artistic approaches can translate abstract threats into actionable information that builds preparedness.

Examples:

1. **The Harrison Studio's "Force Majeure" series** combines scientific data visualisation, narrative text, and speculative mapping to help communities understand climate adaptation strategies. Their work translates complex ecological knowledge into accessible formats that communities can use for planning and decision-making.
2. **Marjetica Potrč's "Dry Toilet"** project in Caracas combines functional infrastructure (composting toilets) with educational diagrams and community workshops that teach water conservation in drought-prone areas. This approach transforms ecological knowledge into practical preparedness through demonstrable solutions.
3. **Amy Franceschini/Futurefarmers' "Seed Journey" (2016-2017)** documents the voyage of ancient grains from Oslo to Istanbul, teaching communities about agricultural biodiversity and seed preservation through workshops at each port. This project directly builds community preparedness through transfer of practical knowledge about food sovereignty and heritage agriculture.

7. Preparedness / Local Collaboration

How can partnerships with local entities enhance community preparedness?

Strategic collaborations with local organisations can amplify and sustain preparedness initiatives beyond individual artistic projects.

Examples:

1. **Mary Miss's "City as Living Laboratory"** partners with municipal agencies, scientists, and community organisations to create public installations that reveal urban infrastructure systems. These collaborations help communities understand and prepare for challenges like water management and climate adaptation through multi-sector knowledge integration.
2. **Raumlabor Berlin's "Floating University"** transformed a rainwater basin in Berlin into an educational campus by collaborating with environmental organisations, universities, and the water utility. This partnership created a laboratory for learning about water management during climate change through hands-on experimentation.
3. **Ayşe Erkmen's "Plan B" (2011)** demonstrates preparedness through local collaboration by partnering with water engineers to create a functional water filtration system as an art installation during Documenta 13. The project made water infrastructure visible while building partnerships between technical experts and cultural institutions, addressing water security preparedness.

8. Preparedness / Public Programmes

How can supplementary activities build capacity for community resilience?

Programmes extending beyond the artwork itself can provide concrete skills and networks essential for preparedness.

Examples:

1. **Fritz Haeg's "Edible Estates"** transforms suburban lawns into productive gardens through a programme of design workshops, planting days, harvest festivals, and cookbook exchanges. These activities build community food resilience through ongoing skill development and relationship building.
2. **Public Lab's "Grassroots Mapping" programme** teaches communities to use DIY aerial photography for environmental monitoring and disaster response through ongoing workshops. The programme builds concrete technical skills while creating community networks for environmental monitoring and advocacy, empowering citizens with tools for territorial documentation.

3. **Mierle Laderman Ukeles' "Touch Sanitation" and subsequent public works** demonstrate decades-long engagement with New York's sanitation department through sustained workshops, tours, and education initiatives. This work builds public understanding of maintenance systems critical for urban resilience by revealing the typically invisible labour that sustains urban functionality.

9. Resistance / Local Community Engagement

How can art mobilise community resistance to threatening forces?

Art can provide frameworks for collective resistance by engaging communities in identifying challenges and developing creative responses.

Examples:

1. **Tania Bruguera's "Tatlin's Whisper #6" (2009) and subsequent activism** demonstrates resistance through community engagement in a high-stakes political context. Her creation of platforms for free speech in Cuba and subsequent Institute of Artivism directly engages communities in developing tactics for political resistance against censorship.
2. **Jeanne van Heeswijk's "Freehouse" project** in Rotterdam's Afrikaanderwijk neighbourhood mobilised residents against gentrification by creating cooperative production spaces, markets, and community-managed infrastructure. This built economic alternatives that established community ownership of local resources and cultural production.
3. **Center for Tactical Magic's "Tactical Ice Cream Unit"** combines ice cream distribution with radical literature and community broadcasting, creating a mobile platform for neighbourhood organising. This approach combines pleasure with political information sharing, making resistance accessible through everyday social interactions.

10. Resistance / Knowledge-Spreading Objectives

How can art educate communities about resistance methods and histories?

Art can transfer knowledge about resistance strategies across time and space, building informed opposition to threatening systems.

Examples:

1. **Trevor Paglen's photography** documents classified military installations and surveillance infrastructure, making visible hidden systems of power. His exhibitions, publications, and workshops teach communities to

recognise and resist surveillance through visual literacy and critical spatial awareness.

2. **Forensic Architecture's "Environmental Violence" projects** demonstrate knowledge-spreading about resistance by combining rigorous research methodologies with accessible public presentations. Communities use these resources in environmental justice struggles, as the documentation of ecocide and environmental racism builds public capacity to challenge corporate and state violence through evidence-based advocacy.
3. **subRosa collective's "Cell Track" and biotech resistance projects** fulfil the resistance criteria through feminist interventions that educate communities about biotechnology and reproductive technologies. Their tactical workshops and publications build public understanding of biotech resistance strategies while addressing gender and technology issues through participatory research.

11. Resistance / Local Collaboration

How can partnerships strengthen collective resistance to harmful systems?

Strategic alliances between artists and local organisations can create more sustainable and effective resistance.

Examples:

1. **Liberate Tate** collaborated with climate activists, museum workers, and legal experts to create unauthorised performances in the Tate Modern that ultimately succeeded in ending BP sponsorship. This partnership combined artistic intervention with environmental organising strategies, demonstrating how targeted cultural actions can effect institutional change.
2. **Not An Alternative's "The Natural History Museum"** partners with indigenous communities, scientists, and environmental organisations to create travelling exhibitions that challenge extraction-based narratives in traditional museums. This collaborative approach creates counter-institutional spaces that reframe natural history through decolonial and ecological perspectives.
3. **Superflex's "Free Beer" and "Copylight" projects** demonstrate resistance through local collaboration by creating open-source economic models that communities can adapt. Their partnerships with brewers, manufacturers, and lawyers create practical alternatives to intellectual

property regimes, demonstrating resistance through collaborative economic experiments that challenge conventional ownership models.

12. Resistance / Public Programmes

How can supplementary activities strengthen and sustain resistance efforts?

Extended programming can build the skills, networks, and institutional structures needed for long-term resistance.

Examples:

1. **Chto Delat's School of Engaged Art** combines exhibitions with an ongoing free school offering workshops, reading groups, and collaborative productions. These activities build sustained communities of artistic resistance beyond individual projects by creating alternative educational structures and collective knowledge production.
2. **Ultra-red's "Public Record"** combines sound installations with ongoing listening sessions, organising workshops, and community research processes. This methodology develops collective capacity for analysing and responding to gentrification through sonic investigation and participatory action research.
3. **The Guerrilla Girls' workshops and education programmes** demonstrate long-term resistance through public programmes spanning decades. Their workshops on institutional critique and gender analysis have equipped generations of participants with tools for challenging art world inequities, modelling sustained activist practice through accessible forms of cultural intervention.

Conclusion

This comprehensive matrix analysis demonstrates how the CIRCULAR framework transforms minimal guidance into detailed analytical tools. By providing structure without dictating content, it enables thoughtful engagement with institutional parameters while supporting creative expansion where needed.

The populated matrix becomes more than an analytical exercise -- it serves as a resource for understanding how different artistic practices can address complex themes through varied methodological approaches. As this case study shows, sometimes the most generative frameworks emerge not from exhaustive institutional direction but from the creative tension between structure and interpretation.

Through this case study, we've demonstrated that the CIRCULAR matrix framework offers:

- A systematic approach to developing collaborative projects from minimal information
- A flexible structure that adapts to various institutional contexts
- A tool for discovering connections between diverse artistic practices
- A method for building inclusive, interdisciplinary networks

By transforming sparse guidance into comprehensive frameworks, communities can confidently develop their own collaborative networks that address complex challenges through creativity and collective action.

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