

Informed consent form: Participatory Action Research project with Utopia School

Introduction

This is the informed consent form for the participatory action research (PAR) project taking place during Flux's month long exhibition, Utopia School. Before you can participate, please read this document in order to understand the nature of this project, and the risks you may encounter. This project is entirely voluntary and confidential. Before you decide to participate at any level, you can contact the initial researcher, Stephen Polk at stephen.polka@gmail.com, with any questions or concerns.

This project emerged from conversations between Stephen Polk, the initial researcher, and the Utopia School organizing team. Stephen Polk comes from a social justice and community organizing background, as well as a research and academic background. His master's thesis from UC Denver entitled, *Permaculture, anarchism and anarchy in Denver's collective community* engaged in participant observation of communities that Stephen was an active participant and resident for 8 years. Stephen is a private researcher, meaning that he is not legally or in any way beholden to a university or other legal entity.

Nature of the research

The method of this research is called Participatory Action Research (see Appendix I below). The organizing team has identified four goals for our research (these are subject to change according to the full consent of the research team).

1. To identify and document information that is necessary for re-imagining the world.
2. To strengthen the Utopia School as an organizational body that is successful now and into the future through collaborative self-reflection.
3. To address issues of diversity within Utopia School.
4. To make available to the general public both online and in hard copy, a final presentation of the research. Everyone who participates as a "primary researcher" (see Appendix II below) will become a co-author of the research project.

Risks of participation

This research project does not seek out information that will harm you medically or professionally. It may carry certain social risks, however. It is primarily concerned with identifying, understanding and overcoming issues and problems that we all confront and discuss throughout our daily lives as community members, artists, curators and organizers. However, as with any research, risks or potential harms can arise at any time.

By agreeing to participate in this research project, and depending on your level of involvement (see Appendix II), you will be asked to participate in any or all of the following in pursuit of the four goals stated above: Designing research tools and activities such as questionnaires, surveys, discussion groups, and one-on-one interviews, and also to participate in taking part in any or all of these. It is important to note that while the first two goals stated above are fairly neutral in that this information is discussed on a daily basis, the third goal regarding diversity of age, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc. can be a sensitive issue within artistic and activist groups. If you choose to participate

in this aspect of the research you may risk compromising your social standing by expressing opinions that are deemed unacceptable by the group at large. This risk is social in nature, and could change or harm your relationship with others and to social networks directly involved with Utopia School and beyond. Please be informed of this risk!

Benefits of participation

1. Individual creative self-reflection for purposes of becoming better organizers, artists, members, presenters etc.
2. Collective self-reflection in order to strengthen Utopia/Flux, and other stakeholders involved.
3. To understand and take action to remedy any issue or problem we feel needs to be remedied.
4. Production of a physical document to be distributed online and in hard copy.
5. Becoming smarter and more able to articulate and intervene in processes as they are happening in order to create beneficial, progressive change.

Voluntary, Confidential and right to Withdrawal

It is important to reiterate that your participation is voluntary. At any time throughout the research, you can also refuse to participate or withdrawal from the entire process. It is also confidential, meaning that at no point during this process will you be asked to reveal your identity. You can remain as anonymous or transparent as you wish. This includes the ability to not disclose any personal identifiers such as your name, group association, physical characteristics, orientation, etc.

How to consent to participate

In order to consent to be a participant at any level, you first need to read this document in its entirety and to understand the risks involved to your social standing. After this first step, your initial consent is expressed by showing up to the scheduled classes.

Please contact Stephen Polk with any questions: stephen.polka@gmail.com

Appendix I:

Participatory + Action + Research

- PAR requires us to **participate** together in identifying an issue or problem for the explicit purpose of addressing said issue, or overcoming a problem.
- In other words, the process involves us taking **action** together to improve things.
- **Research** is the means by which we carefully observe issues or problems, make plans to address them, take action to remedy them, and then analyze the final results.
- Those who wish to participate in this process, can become active researchers themselves or participate in any aspect of the research they choose.
- The research team will all decide what is or isn't important to study. Clarifying what is meant by participation, as opposed to mere involvement, Tandon provides three qualifications:
 1. "people's role in setting the agenda of the inquiry;
 2. "people's participation in the data collection and analysis; and
 3. "people's control over the use of outcomes and the whole process."*

*"Tandon's reference to control over 'the whole process' means even the research methodology (PAR) itself may be reinterpreted and reconstituted by participants" (Tandon quoted by McTaggart 1997, 29).

Appendix II:

Type and Degree of Involvement

The table below presents different types and degrees that you can become involved. By type of involvement, we refer to the specific activity that you can engage in, which is organized by the degree, or intensity and required time of each activity. Please note that these are mere categories and suggestions, and they may not reflect your actual participation. Your participation is completely voluntary at every step of the process.

Type and degree of involvement.

Primary Researcher

- Read and sign the informed consent form and all materials produced to date.
- Attend more than two weekly PAR meetings.
- Participate in multiple aspects of collaborative research including but not limited to: collaborative planning, research design and implementation, and analysis of research.

Degree of participation: high

Contributing Researcher

- Read and sign the informed consent form and all materials produced to date.
- Attend more than one weekly PAR meeting
- Participate in more than one aspect of collaborative research including but not limited to: collaborative planning, research design and implementation, and analysis of research.

Degree of participation: Moderate

Research Participant

- Read and sign the informed consent form and other pertinent materials.
- Participate in interview, group discussion, in-person or online questionnaire or survey.

Degree of participation: Low