

The Hidden Town

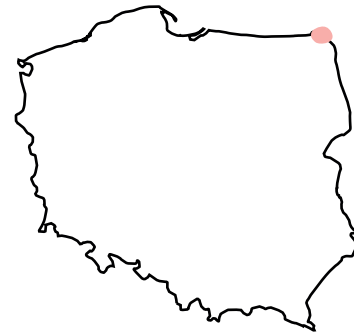
Ukryte Miasto

LOCATION

Sejny, Poland

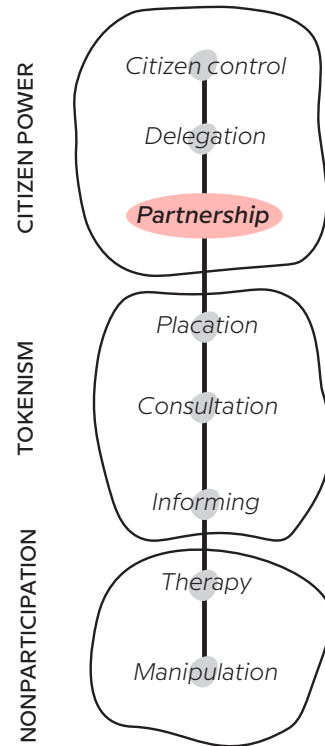
TIME PERIOD

From 2020 to 2021



THE PROJECT

In the past, Sejny was a multicultural settlement. This characteristic was very useful for the implementation of the Hidden Town project. Its aim was to **discover the history of the town** by the youngsters who listened to the **personal stories of the elderly citizens**. The stories were then used for creating a unique **subjective map of the town**, presenting important people and places from the past. Additionally, an installation representing the town was created, where each cubicle resembling a miniature flat was a visual reinterpretation of a story. Then, the installation was displayed in the White Synagogue.



DESCRIPTION OF THE SPACE

Sejny can be described as a remote place mainly by its geographical location. Far away from the biggest cities in Poland, the **access to it is very limited**. This remoteness is also characterised by a **low population density** or the difficulties in accessing daily life facilities. Although the region is popular during the summer, its attractiveness drops in the off-season. There are many public spaces but the infrastructure is not sufficient. According to the inhabitants, the town suffers from the **lack of quality leisure and meeting spaces**.

INITIATION AND ACTORS

This project was **implemented at the initiative and under the supervision of artists** of the Borderland Centre in the frame of memory protection

work. They appealed to a **group of 12 children from Sejny to interview older people** from the settlement about their memories and anecdotes.

ROLE OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY & METHODS USED

Although the project was not their own initiative, the local community was at the heart of the activities. The transfer of memories was made possible by the willingness of Sejny's senior citizens to share their memories to the teenagers, who related their words in the final publication. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic required a bigger involvement of the parents, especially in logistical matters because common work was impossible. Therefore, **all age groups were involved in the project**. The artists' experience with similar initiatives was crucial.

The project was developed thanks to the funding from the Ministry of Culture.

RESULT

The targeted goal of this initiative was to **develop the ability of young people to be more attentive to others and to better understand their environment**. With these activities, the participants got a deep understanding of how valuable their place of living is. Beyond these objectives, one of the most important aspects is the continuity of the work that lasts until today. Moreover, the subjective map was an important teaching aid and a unique showcase of the city. Although the local community was obviously the main beneficiary, **members of small communities also received more attention** (such as Lithuanians or Roma families). However, although **some inhabitants were enthusiastic about this initiative, others were more sceptical**.



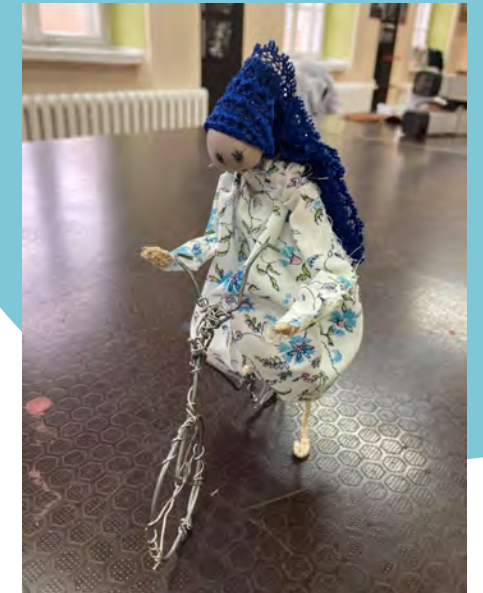
The Hidden Town project. The map of Sejny designed by Barbara Karolina Kotowska



The Hidden Town project - workshops ©Wiesław Szumiński, Bożena Szroeder, Michał Moniuszko



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Sejny, Podlachia, Poland

more about this project



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Link to the publication:
<http://www1.uirs.si/en-us/book/id/119>