

It was 2014. Back then, I was organizing Athens Plaython with an amazing team.

At this moment, I had figured out everything about Athens Plaython in my mind. It was the 3rd year of the festival, I had my team, I was thriving, I started to comprehend what was going on, people loved me, and everything was great.

Two weeks before the event, another festival called me. They were interested in playfulness in public space for people with disabilities, and they asked me to help them organise something. Disability is my other passion, I mean my PhD is about games and disability. So, of course, 2 weeks before MY big event I said: "yes, why not"! I took some of my best game designers, with wonderful games that we playtested, and we made sure that they were super inclusive, that everybody could play. The day of the festival I woke up really early with a big fever, but I had already said yes so I had to be there. Then, I start to receive phone calls. My first designer tells me that she is very sick and that she cannot come. My second designer tells me that his mom had an issue and he is unable to attend. So I have only one game, really professional for a kind of mini-festival.. Anyway, I said to myself: "Ok..we will manage.. We will make it happen".

When I arrive at the place, and I realise that the organisers didn't understand that the games are supposed to be for adults with disabilities. But.. the place is filled with kids yelling, there is not a single person with a disability in sight. I have one game, that cannot even be played because the terrain did not allow the game to stick on the floor. And I am there, I see angry kids, angry parents, the organisers are super angry about it but they are not helpful at all. As if I SHOULD have done something. All of a sudden, I see a team of young adults with serious disability arriving, like cerebral palsy etc. I get super embarrassed, stressed about what I will do (I'm also burning up with a 39 degree fever).

I remember sitting in the middle of that yard, watching desperately my designer sitting over there with a game that could not be played at all. I had brought with me some rope, different balls... so the young kids had taken everything and it really was CHAOS.

Amongst the chaos arrives a girl in her 20s. She is in a wheelchair. She comes to me and says: "WOW! That's one of the most fun and amazing parties I have ever been to!" I realised at that moment that her experience entering the space was completely different from what I had designed. I had to make it work.

So all of a sudden I said to my designers "ok guys, let's create a Temporary Autonomous Zone of Playfulness, and let's party in chaos". We brought music, we created mini games, we allowed people with or without disabilities to hack traditional games or to create music games while dancing...

In the end, when I returned home I was drained, with zero energy, but I'd had fun! I really had fun! It wasn't because of me, it was thanks to them: if that girl didn't approach me I wouldn't have seen things differently.

The thing is that I allowed myself to get help from the people around, something that I hadn't been doing in the past, and I've always done since that incident. I allowed myself to be open to change, and not to be angry with anyone. I wasn't angry with the designers, because it is ok to be human. I wasn't angry with the organisers, who were not helpful at all; and instead of being angry, I just decided to be OPEN.

This experience made me less afraid of failing, it allowed me to understand that if I am able to take what is given to me, and switch it, there is no failure in being honest. I was always someone super afraid of failure, and there I couldn't avoid it. I was blessed to be able to take this failure, observe it, and then enjoy it. I cannot tell you that I am not afraid of failure anymore. Of course I am - it is in my genes. I just try to avoid failing by switching, adjusting, by allowing others to help me, being open to auto-change, open to suggestions by seeing others in a horizontal way. This is a happy failure because it helped me on that, and it also helped me to say no. When I realise that a situation is risky, or when I feel the people calling me are not really my type of people, I say no even to a really good proposal. So these are the 2 lessons.

I love failing, but only until the point when I know I can still switch it.

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