

## **ART, CITY, SOCIETY: NEW VISION AND PERSPECTIVES FOR VENICE**

*Around research and shared visions with bodies and institutions operating in the territory for a responsible transformation of civil society*

The workshop Arte Città Società – New visions and prospects for Venice, care of Filippo Fabbrica (coordinator of Love Difference – artistic movement for an inter-Mediterranean politics) and Juan E. Sandaval (Manager of Cittadellarte Art Office) in collaboration with Venice International University, was born with the aim of constructing a network of participants that share the idea of a socially responsible transformation in the venetian context.

The workshop is conducted according to the thoughts and experience matured from Artway of Thinking and Love Difference. For the successful completion of a creative process the direct and planned involvement of human resources that are already active within the territory, as well as external professionals, is fundamental. For this reason the creation of an interdisciplinary *gruppo operativo* is the founding moment of the projects trajectory, the point of joining and confronting, to plan useful social projects that, through creative processes, value peoples ability and the material resources of cities and their islands. Recognition of the potential of individuals and of the territory in the connective context are considered at a methodological level, vital conditions for giving life to artistic-cultural projects that involve and stimulate their subjects dedication in an attempt to responsibly transform the social environment in which we live.

“Creating culture”, today, can be translated with “giving space to the individual expression in collectivity”; teaching to express ourselves and living in group, speaking with the differences of the other (cultural, professional, ethnical...); stimulating the recognition of the value people already have as individuals, as citizens of their city, of their own geographical area, etc..., connected with the contemporary “global”view. (Artway of Thinking).

When with respect to a reference mark on an initiative in general an interdisciplinary approach is adopted, a behavior aimed at taking on the complexity of reality is assumed, since as Edgard Morin confirms, the complexity of elements connected in a social context are taken into account. With the expression *complessità all'opera* it is intended that the prospect of complexity be transposed from a purely conceptual level (theoretical dimension) to the functional level, and hence put into practice in the phase in which a project becomes concrete. In practice this occurs by involving participants with theoretical competence and heterogeneous professionals, favouring interaction to broaden the optics of observation and interpretation of the issue in question and to stimulate collaboration in view of a shared objective.

Moving to a level of reduced abstraction, it is noticeable that the approach adopted to carry out the objective of a socially responsible transformation calls to mind the methodological version of *action research*. With action research, a research epistemologically orientated operation is intended, aimed not in a normative way, but constructive, with transformative objectives within the context in which it operates. Innovations of this type of research are founded on the assumption that each process of social transformation implies not only knowledge on the area in question, so not just the analysis and consultancy of the researcher, although even the direct involvement of those who do live within that context is necessary. Action research revolves around the acknowledgement of the potential, of sharing, and of support for social transformations: here the search for a participated intervention can be defined, that consorts theory and experience, so attributing value even through the method of so called *learning by doing*. Through learning by doing participants learn to listen, to adopt a multiperspective approach to a problem, and to adapt their own organisational skills to the context that has been defined. Through an avenue of self-definition taking form, one or more groups that together relate to the artists the meaning of innovation, transformation, sharing, participation, common good, sustainability, art; in this way shedding light on projects for the issues in which intervention is desired.

The artistic process supports the activation of a network of relations that are based around the issue of responsible social transformation: but it is not around the work of art itself that the question is based. The choice to collaborate with participants of context poses the problem of managing the group dynamics that emerge from such interactions, and that can be charged with conflict. The concept of group dynamics was introduced to psychology by Kurt Lewin to

indicate the relations that occur in a group and influence its development and behavior. Lewin invented the T. Group technique: a method of group conduct based on the idea that subjective change can, if well orientated, become the principle of a re-balance in group relations, and so the origin of a corresponding interpersonal modification process and of the surrounding context. The T. Group is a residential experience lead by trainers who have the role of stimulating but in no context pedagogical: it is not their purpose to tell the group what it does or doesn't have to do.

The co-ordinators of the workshop organise various meetings with experts to deepen the knowledge of Venice's multiple aspects: from tourism to the natural environment, from industrial or artisan productions to cultural activities. The participants are the historic Luca Pes, teacher of History of the City of the Urban Government at the university IUAV of Venice; Stefano Micelli, director of TeDIS, centre for research at Venice International University and professor of Economics and Business Management at the University Cà Foscari of Venice; Fabio Fornasier and Andrea Penzo, designers and glass contractors; Federica Thiene from Artway of Thinking; the architect Giorgio Pilla, Manager of the urban department at Venice Council. There have been other meetings with the representatives of the bimonthly 'Venezia da Vivere', of digital television 'Venice TV Channel' and other representatives of tertiary activities.

A day is dedicated to three participants of the workshop to the end of creating a shared vision on the themes that have emerged and to be able to work on the idealisation of intervention projects for the city. The topics around which the discussions on Venice and its surroundings are based are isolation, the lack of meaningful relations, the problem of livability, of sustainable tourism, and of the lack of green spaces. Some stereotypes are discussed, such as the invasive tourist, foreigners who sell in the city squares, and of students who disturb but don't consume. From the discussion it emerges that many local institutions believe in the role that art and culture can play to favour a social transformation in Venice with respect to its problems. Public art in particular, since it is inspired by a deep and true sense of *Polis*, could be the key turning point for the modification of the image of itself that Venice offers the rest of the world; that is the image of a postcard city, over-run by Gondolas and masks.

Following analysis, investigations, checks, rectifications, three groups are formed, three sections of work able to activate new relations with the surrounding context, able to read the context and create new synergies with the territory. From these sectors of work three artistic projects have taken life, based on the following issues: the livability of the city, relations, reclamation of green spaces, the relationship between Venice and the other islands of the lagoon. The following projects take form: *Questionpoint? Puntodidomanda? Utopie, distopie e paradisi terrestri. Un'isola galleggiante per Venezia e Un record per Pellestrina. Tuttu insieme per ricamare il merletto più lungo del mondo.*

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