

# Methods, but which ones?

On 2nd and 3rd October the workshop entitled “Methods — research projects on art-society relations” took place at Cittadellarte, presenting the work of six artist groups and creating a situation of dialogue between them. The name of the workshop — “Methods” — pointed out since the beginning the main intention of the two-day discussions: the methodologies used in the various projects were what we wanted to know furtherly.

The participants of the round table had in common that they intervened all on specific social situations and intended to cause a change via artistic actions. This goal requested by all them an intense confrontation with a particular social reality and therefore most of the projects were based on a long-term presence of the artists on site: real changes need real time. For instance, the artistic group **c a l c**, had lived and worked in the north of Spain for the past twelve years, **Bert Theis** and his team work in the Isola — a quarter of Milan since the year 2001. The time passed together with a group of people also had an influence on the methods the projects worked with: things are not the same over a long period of time and the methods have to meet with these changes. A fixed methodology will not be able to serve in the long run and it might be more useful to speak in terms of a set of methods, ready to be adapted based on needs. One of the conclusions of the workshop could already be Methods as tools.

At first sight some listeners found the projects presented in the workshop quite similar — as they were all long term projects working in specific social contexts. But very soon it became clear that there were strong differences between them, which were on the one hand created by the contrasting realities which they worked in, on the other hand by the method or the approach adapted by the artistic group. One point which we were having a closer look at was the way every project positioned itself on the axes society-artworld. While **significans** was working on the topic of immigration politics in the rather “classic” form of exhibitions in art spaces, other groups were working on the borderline of activism or social work: the “product” or “object” of the process is the dialogue itself, as in the case of the intervention of Stalker in the public housing complex Corviale in the southern periphery of Rome.

Another point that crystallized itself in the discussions was the different kind of involvement in the social realities and the way in which the artists groups came in contact with the people they wanted to work with. Some of the projects entered the social contexts directly, under the form of immediate action. The protagonists of the **IDA/OUT**-project in the Isola-quarter of Milan for example did not wait for any town council permissions,

they just squatted a place, the so-called "la Stecca" building, started to do exhibitions and to work together with independent citizens' groups. Other collectives worked more cautiously, and we discovered in this context the role of the mediator: **The Bureau de Compétences et Désirs** communicates between social groups and artists. Before commissioning an artist for an intervention in a specific context, discussions and talks get started by the members of the Bureau. They define themselves as mediators and the role of being the transmitter in a process makes up an essential part of their work. Also **Katja Lindquist** was presenting a project which included a mediator or a third partner: the "Airis program", for which she has been working as a researcher, created collaborations between artists and companies. Independently, both companies and artists were found to work within a project framework. So neither the companies nor the artists chose each other directly, which resulted in the case of the project of the dramatist **Petra Revenue** in a strange and unbridgeable distance.

Entering in a social context always means getting in touch with people, means communicating. So also the language used to address people became an important topic of the workshops' discussions. The relationship with individuals or a group of people will be different, depending on how you establish the contacts. c a l c decided for the individual, the slow and sensitive route: when they first got the village of Las Aceñas in the north of Spain, they first of all started rebuilding the house they were going to live in, their "mothership". Then they slowly moved towards an intervention in the village itself, establishing individual contacts with the inhabitants and trying to get a feel for the situation. As the project **IDA** is situated in an altogether diverse context, also the language used by the project is a totally different one: to communicate the future plans for the "la Stecca" building to the inhabitants of the area, mega-size banners were placed along the street. The team around Bert Theis created by this methodology a similarity with large building projects by private investors or town councils. The only difference is that this time a utopia gets presented, the realization of the wishes of the people living in the area.

During the two days at Cittadellarte topics of communication, language and of systems were analyzed. A stimulating exchange between groups working in very different realities was created and helped to position every single project within a wider spectrum. And as the intense talks were going on until late at night, we saw this as a positive sign to go on with the research and to start planning "Methods II".

by **Julia Trolp**, artist