

# Art becomes science and projects social transformation

From the 26th and the 29th of January 2006, on the occasion of ArteFiera di Bologna, the second edition of the international workshop *Methods - Research projects on art-society relations*, took place curated by Filippo Fabbrica and Juan E. Sandoval, Art Factories and in collaboration with K@2 and Autre(s)pARTs.

During the days of the workshop, six multidisciplinary groups were placed in debate with each other, with the objective to raise questions on the methods and processes of the realisation of creative projects of social transformation, and to characterise common values and projectual steps that could be useful in their realisation.

To reason over methods in fact, means to look for guidelines for confronting the problems that many ideas and projects encounter during the passage from the phase of projection to the one of actualisation.

For every project presented, the journey of realisation, the difficulty faced and the strategies to resolve them, were addressed.

The stress was on immediate active and constant involvement of the relevant community where the project would take place, this was even proposed, in this second edition of *Methods*, as a primary value within the various projects.

In this sense, the experience of the project *Trasmissions: vers la constitution d'un lieu culturel autogéré en zone refuge*, realised in Lebanon was relevant. The project realised by the NGO **Asiles**<sup>1</sup>, has implemented significant activities in the form of artistic workshops, run by international artists for young people and children who live in the Palestinian refugee community of Camp Baddawi, one of the 12 camps present in Lebanon, where a depreciated and marginalised society exists.

For those responsible for the project, involvement means, to create spaces and to generate times of sharing, to activate open communication and to dialogue with the community. The project should be flexible, based on the method of learning by doing, that is to say it should continually interact and respond to the necessities of the context in which it intervenes. The goal of the project is that of a relation with the true necessities, lived and felt by the community. The goal was to try to pass on an inclination towards self management, to motivate the people towards an independence in the conduction of the project, giving possibility to the participants, once they have gained the knowledge, skills and experience to carry it further on in its autonomy.

Those responsible for the project affirm: "Only in this way, can we perhaps succeed in initiating a real chain of lasting changes on the territory." Through the project *Trasmissions: vers la constitution d'un lieu culturel autogéré en zone refuge*, the magazine "L'Espoir" was created, in collaboration with the community of the Baddawi Camp, which contributed in making the project sustainable, and financially viable in time. It also achieved the objective of stimulating the community in the construction of a new critical and active conscience on the context in which it lives. This was also the distinctive value of the project experience of **Nowa\_Huta.rtf (relations, texts, form)**<sup>2</sup>, realised by the Malopolski Instytut Kultury in Poland. The project tried, through diverse activities, to stimulate the local community of Nowa\_Huta.rtf to rethink and rebuild a human and emotional relationship with the industrial district in which it was placed. Through a reconstruction of the collective memory of the place itself, the local community was involved in the reconstruction of a story and of the links of the territory, through testimonials, images and objects. Everything was collected and made visible in a publication, which became the narrative and visual medium of the process of rediscovery and re-significance of Nowa\_Huta.rtf. Furthermore we underlined the importance of the organisation of information, both at the beginning and the end, during the realisation of all the phases of the project. It allowed the reconstruction of the path, the rethinking of the method and made visible the results.

During the development of *Methods*, the idea was raised that the theme of the project, the recipients and the social context of interaction, require (since initiation) a careful choice of language and means of communication.

*Real Fictions: Reflections on Future Worlds in Four Parts*, realised in Romania by **D Media**<sup>3</sup> Association, is an open source project, a media "of experiences" open to schools and to the young generation, finalised with the construction of a social message and the acquisition of new skills. The project has realised four experimental documentaries, which invited the viewer to reflect on traditions and on the social and historical problems of the country.

The employment and valorization of a specific language as an effective instrument of communication and social involvement on specific themes, is at the centre of the research made by **Africa e Mediterraneo**<sup>4</sup>. Its logistic base is in Bologna (Italy). Through different activities, especially the editorials, the quarterly magazine, *Common Values* and the intercultural didactic guide *Africa Comics -*, are advanced as incentives towards cooperation and the intercultural dialogue between the population. Through the use of the language of comics, schools, students, teachers, communities and artists become involved. The published comics tackle the themes of dialogue and relationships within the population, often initiating from universal themes of mankind, like friendship, love and social integration.

The project highlighted further methodological hints, pointing out ones own method as a multidisciplinary, multi-channeled and multicultural process. In this fundamental sense, it has been up to those responsible for Africa and the Mediterranean, to expand on the knowledge of resources and the channels that are useful for sustainability of the project on a national and international level. Also to maintain good and

constant internal communication, even at a significant geographical distance. To always keep open a dialogue of debate and revision on what they are doing. Moreover despite always remaining flexible, it has been necessary to fix a time limit and also to fix the various steps of development of the project.

What transpires from the projects is a clear creative tension, which underlies its realisation. They are all conceived moreover, like tools, real channels of communication and social reflections. The knowledge and the resources that are made available, become keys of interpretation, instruments of change “delivered” to those belonging to the context of the intervention, the true protagonists of the project. For this reason it is essential to conceive of a constant time-period for the “getting to know” of the others, for dialogue and for the formation and promotion of the activities of the project. “On the part of the curators there should be the awareness and responsibility of giving the participants an instrument of freedom with which they can go onwards on their own”<sup>5</sup>.

The project **The Hermitage Park**<sup>6</sup> in Casablanca, realised in Morocco, has returned the theme of the Methods discussion to the problematic notion of the concretisation of the idea. Through mapping and contextual knowledge and the organisation of open DIY workshops and meetings with the local community, it has been possible to turn the attention of the political administration onto a vast abandoned green area in the city of Casablanca. The project created an actual “material” prototype of a park for the requalification of the area. This is important in guaranteeing the feasibility of the project and for the initiation of a practical evolution. The draft model makes the idea visible, it gathers possible useful materials, organises a first physical space of work and workshops, and enters into real and direct contact with the people who are to be involved. Moreover, it makes the project clearly identifiable, through the acquisition of a symbol, a poetry and a visible image.

As a first phase of the model’s evolution on a full-scale, *The Hermitage Park* in Casablanca realised a statue in the form of lions, for the park. It substituted the semi destroyed and unrecognisable version already existing in the area. The statue, later replicated in small saleable models, then becomes a fund of sustainability and an identifiable symbol of the project on a national and international scale.

Finally, **ASC-Play against Violence**<sup>7</sup>, 2004, a project realised in Macedonia at Skopje, which was aimed at children and young people with problems with family and general inclusion into society, was presented. ASC-Play against Violence, 2004 has created creative spaces that also organise different activities within the living contexts of young people, with the aim to valorise their interest and abilities, through involvement, flexibility and the opening of dialogue. The young people created an outdoor acrobatic and street-performance dance show. The process of realisation of the project’s goals, focused on the values and activities of organisation and coordination of work groups. In this sense, some priorities that need to be considered have been identified; the method has to be conceived as a kind of “asymmetric flexibility”(as those responsible for the project define it).

This implies that the realised ideas should always be generated and acknowledged

by the whole group and never by a single source. Also, there should always be a strong orientation towards the process and not only to the final results. To work in a group in fact, means to primarily build a path and a network of human relations, which takes a long time. To create groups following an interdisciplinary logic, and to obtain a balance between relational informality and the roles that are generated for the functioning of the group, requires the presence of a mediator between the different groups. The mediator should be external and impartial, a charismatic leader able to make the groups responsible and to stimulate them to single out possible synergies to activate.

In conclusion, during the workshop, the participants acknowledged that every project should be addressed with specific methods and tools, often inapplicable and not useful in other contexts. Nonetheless, methods helped to conceive the specific projects not only as individual artistic interventions for social transformation, but also as part of a wider project of analysis and reflection on art, intended as a "science" of imagination, projection and the realisation of a different idea of society.

by **Massimo Bullo**, independent curator

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1. [www.asiles.org](http://www.asiles.org)
  2. [www.mik.krakow.pl](http://www.mik.krakow.pl)
  3. [www.dmedia.ro](http://www.dmedia.ro)
  4. [www.africaemediterraneo.it](http://www.africaemediterraneo.it)
  5. Filippo Fabbrica, creator, curator and coordinator of *Methods*
  6. [www.lasourcedulion.org](http://www.lasourcedulion.org)
  7. [www.multimedia.org.mk](http://www.multimedia.org.mk)