

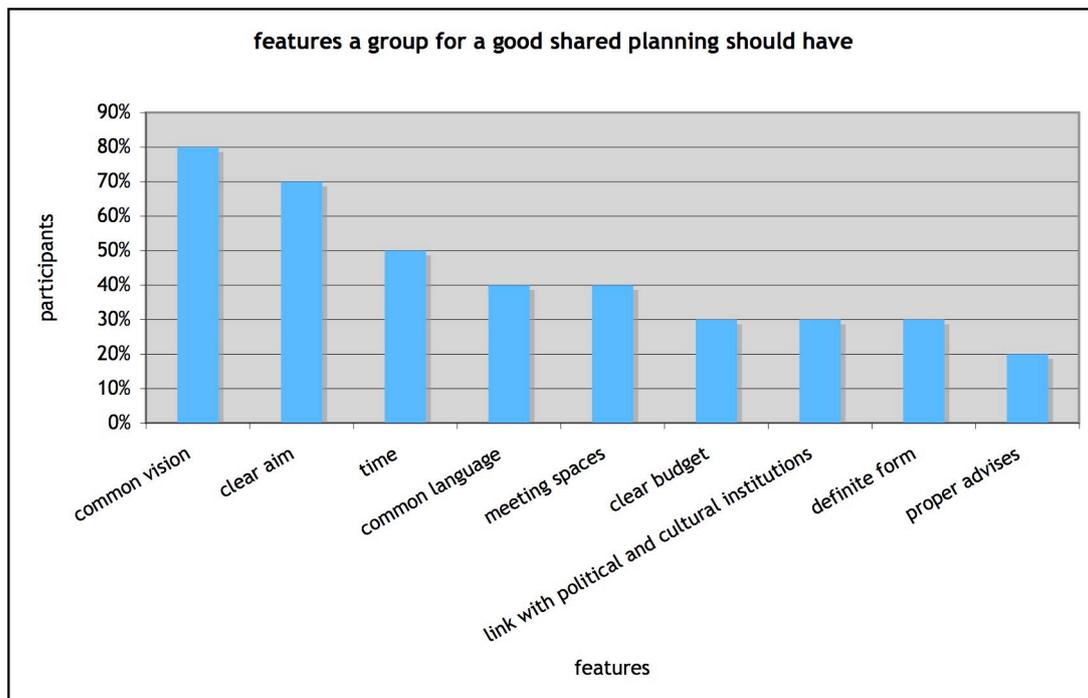
EVALUATION WORKSHOP “The City is one of us”
BIELLA (18th to 29th of June, 2007) - BARI (25th to 31st of May, 2008)

The two shared planned workshops took first place in Biella (June 07) where an international group of young artist developed together with curators, artists and cultural activators a contribution for their collective participation in the “XIII Biennale of Young Creatives from Europe and the Mediterranean (Bjcem)” which would take place in Bari (May 08). It needs to be pointed out that for both workshops the process rather than the results was important. This is given to the fact that both were based on the learning by doing concept and took place within a continuous progress.

Below you can find the evaluation of the workshops as well as some statements the participants gave.

1. - COMMON VISION

According to the responses given by the participants about the features that a group for a good shared planning should have, the outcome is the following one:



- 1) common vision: 80% of the participants rated this feature as the most important one. More than the half of them even numbered it with the highest level and 30% at the next highest ones.
- 2) clear aim: this was situated by 70% at the higher levels.
- 3) time: half of the participants pointed this feature as a really important one out
- 4) common language: the use of a common language was important for 40%
- 5) meeting spaces: 40% of the participants placed it as very important
- 6) clear budget: this feature is considered quite important by 30%
- 7) link with political and cultural institutions: was considered important by 30%
- 8) definite form: a 30% of the participants considered it important
- 9) proper advices: this feature was considered important by 20% of the participants

2. - ART FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBLE TRANSFORMATION

Since the two workshops were a pilot experience it was important to figure out the main features that an artistic project for socially responsible transformation should have. The answers given by the participants can be resumed in these following features:

- Participation:

Artistic projects for socially responsible transformation of society should be foremost participative, including all the people that are involved by it, therefore the participants who are carrying it out and the public who is going to experience the results.

It should inspire people and empower them; be productive and be challenging to participate; have a clear proposal with the society itself, the environment or the public space.

- Common vision and clear aims:

Therefore it needs clear aims and a vision in order to have practical and visible results in the context of the society in which the group operates. It also should be aware of the impacts it is going to have.

- Communication and a dialogue:

It should cooperate and communicate with each other, have a dialogue with the people involved, which makes it able to exchange ideas and share knowledge. So to define and maintain this common vision it is extremely important to communicate with each other but also with the people who are going to be involved in the project as well as with the cultural and political institutions it is targeted to.

- Knowledge:

The participants should be informed about the society they are living in and also other societies too; have as well as socio - political awareness and show sensitive awareness towards the environment. Since the people involved should play an active role hence the ones who plan the project have to be informed about the political, cultural and social circumstances where the project is going to be inserted in. Sharing the knowledge and experience is a basic feature.

- Transparency:

Finally this kind of project needs to be transparent in relation to the aims, the time and especially the budget. Therefore good coordination skills are required.

3.- ORGANIZATION OF THE WORKSHOP

DURATION

Biella:

Regarding the duration of the workshop the general conclusion was that the one in Biella lasted long enough, which gave the participants time to learn about the argument in theory and than work out a project to develop in Bari. They manage to achieve all the aims, although few more days would be better to clear the idea for the work "The city is one of us".

Long gap:

But the gap between the workshop in Biella and the one in Bari was too long, wherefore the energy and enthusiasm seemed to have weakened and the focus on what the participants had intended to achieve had become confused.

Bari:

Regarding the workshop in Bari, the conditions were not optimal to edit an artistic work for social transformation. This was given to the fact that the gap between the workshop in Biella and the one in Bari had reduced the certainty of doing the project. This uncertainty led the participants to prepare slowly before coming to Bari.

ORGANIZATION IN BIELLA

Regarding the parts of the workshop that the participants considered better organised they agreed that the two weeks in Biella were very well organised. The context such as living and eating as well as the good time planning, the meeting, the curator-tutorships, lectures, presentations and communication were very good. But also experiencing the city with its inhabitants was good.

Find below three statements made by the participants about the workshop in Biella:

“The initial few days [in Biella] that were spent discussing individual view points allowed us to bond as a group and find a united vision. Filippo, Abdallah, Aliaa and Sameh all put in a lot of effort and we could have made better use of their expertise”

“[I liked] Everything, but maybe the best was the many people who came and shared with us their experience in making public art”

“I think all the workshop was really good, from tutors to participants debate. I think that questioning us (from Filippo and Abdallah mostly) was really good and very important because it helped in clearing our thoughts and ideas”.

The parts that were not so good organised instead was finding out a **common concept** in the in the group and the project planning. Also not knowing where the Biennale would take place and the big gap between both workshops made the project aspect a bit unstable. Two participants reflected this in the following statements:

“Getting ready to carry out the workshop in Bari became confusing due to the delay in information about where the Biennale was going to be held. It was too difficult to get everybody to communicate remotely with the social issues of the area we were going to after the decisions to work in Bari had been made”

“[We] didn’t have enough time to realize an artistic work in Bari, it was only a contact with the other participants of the young Biennale and the previous workshop in Biella and we made at least videos that should be better if we had more time!”

When proposing changes or suggestions for the future workshops it was suggested **to send out a text or a movie before** the residencies started, since this would have helped the participants to have some thoughts before they come. And according to the conditions and timing it could be better to specify the common

theme and then let participants find out their own way through more specific circumstances. Even if the time, concentration and energy however should be directed towards project planning and less towards group analysis, the following statements shows that the group was one of the strong points:

“I felt it was unfortunate that the focus of our common vision got lost in the time between Biella and Bari. I think we needed to re-establish why we were there. One problem was that there was a dual reason why many of us were at the Biennale- to exhibit our work and to carry out our project on art for social transformation. This enabled people to feel like they were able [to] attend the other events going on in the Biennale instead of turning up for the realisation of our workshop. They did not respect the time, money and energy put into our project being realised”

Nonetheless it was suggested to stop speaking and analysing a lot without a helpful reason to realize an artistic work. This shows that there should be a **stronger accent on the creativity**. This for example could be done by a presentation of each individual art works at the beginning of the workshop.

4. WORKSHOP CONTENT

When talking about the content, a strong human characteristic sticks out. The **importance of the group** comes clear by seeing that the best thing regarding the content was meeting people and having discussions as well as working in small groups and debating, something that allowed to listen to the solutions of each group.

The group was an important part and so were the exercises to keep the unity of the group such as the presentations and the clapping. Sharing experience was partly possible to the communication within the group, which allowed the participants to say how they were feeling without any censure. This made it also possible to communicate with the curators and collaborators and therefore learn from their experience.

The following statement shows how the group and the human value are considered the best thing of the workshop:

“Spending time talking to Abdallah and Aliaa was really useful [while we were in Biella], they have so much experience and were able to offer so much information on the values of art for social transformation”

But when it comes to the things that were not so useful, it was considered that **too much analysing** and letting the participants work free without a strong frame was sometimes a waste time, since it had been difficult to get a common agreement for a specific work.

The changes proposed for the context or the content, dealt with the realization of the **final product**, since some of the participants considered that this final “product” in Bari was not how they had expected it. Maybe it was superficial compared to the deepness of the arguments treated during the workshop at Biella.

“I felt that the end product of our workshop resulted in us using the city of Bari as a backdrop to our own work rather than us interacting with the local people and creating an inclusive project. I would spend a short amount of time at the very beginning of our time in Bari reading through our project proposals and making sure we were all united in the project we were going to carry out. I felt the group

became splintered in Bari with people doing their own projects regardless of what the group had decided.”

Also the long exercises during the workshop at Biella about the organisation and concept of the workshop in Biennale were not so useful *“because we did not keep the whole unity of our group in Biella and we had experiences in the workshop in Biella that we could never expect and organize in the workshop in Bari”*. This statement connects to the impression that the gap of time between of Biella and Bari was too long.

Regarding the content it could have been defined more what one really wants to change and what does change means, perhaps by finding a form where the workshop is more about creation something or making an action

5.- WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

The general conclusion about the workshop participants was very **positive**. The participants met a lot of interesting people and are still in contact with some of them. They share experiences and were more than they expected. As mentioned before, communication among them worked well and the possibility of free self expression was rated high. There was no artificial politeness - if someone had different ideas or if someone disagreed with someone else he/she was free to say it - therefore, to feel free to speak out their thoughts was very important.

How positive the feeling regarding the other participants was, there was still a **difference between the workshop in Biella and the one in Bari**, as you can read in the statements made by two participants:

“I love this group. I think that everyone had different expectations of the workshop but it was not the problem. In spite of the jokes, we knew how to come to an agreement and build the work, in Biella at least. Bari turned us too much far from this context, this time. The group did not work as the first time anymore.”

“I felt a real connection with all the other workshop participants when we met in Biella, unfortunately in Bari I felt some people were not giving the project their full commitment and were happy to sit back and not give their energy to the project”

INVITED ARTISTS AND LECTURERS

Regarding the invited artists and lecturers in Biella (like Asiles, Gudran, La Source du Lion and Zalab TV), they were considered as a very important part of the workshop, since they are interesting individuals with strong visions and brave art projects. Meeting them was really **interesting and important** for the participant’s own work. Even though they were conscious about the fact that they could not compare their own project with the one from the invited people and vice versa. But it was very useful to see that Asiles, Gudran, La Source du Lion and Zalab TV invented their own structures and do not fit into existing ones. They are working in different areas and in different methods and have diverse types of action, which was really inspiring.

“I thought all of the invited artists/lecturers were really helpful and informative. They had lots of experience in art for social transformation and were happy to pass on their advice in a friendly way.”

“Gudran people were interesting, of course maybe because we were together all the time so there was certain intimacy. Abdallah and Aliaa are good tutors, together with Filippo and Cristiana they’ve shaped and lead us very successfully. With intriguing questions, answers, open solutions... they have managed their aim.”

Impact, raise awareness and

Meeting the invited artists and lectures had quite an **impact on the participants** and was therefore relevant for the workshop in Biella. By listening to the invited people who **spread the knowledge of their work** and discussing all together they got to know a certain way of dealing with artistic expression, public art, activism and participatory projects. It was important since they made the participants think about the role of an artist and art and evaluate if one is going in that direction. The participants also learned about predefined institutions and how not to take them for granted but to be aware on how they define the context. They also gained a **new awareness** about weak communities and how artistic projects can improve their political, social and cultural situation.

“I had never developed a project on art for social transformation so I found everything they had to offer really useful in building my own knowledge to carry out projects in the future”.

“Their work, especially the one of Asiles made me think a lot about the political state of the world and even though I don’t work on public art projects in my own work, I think some of the things we talked about during the workshop are reflected in it for example in my will to take stronger part in some discussions in society”

6.- THE EXPERIENCE

The experience gave the participants the possibility to improve in order of importance

- Setting yourself in a group and understanding your role within this role
- Developing your spirit of observation and identification
- Self- comprehension and comprehension of the others
- Cooperating in the carrying out of cultural and artistic projects
- Reading the complexity and interpreting the contrast in which you work

“I think this experience improved my capability of all these points. Sometimes I was disappointed in myself in how I dealt with the group dynamic issues, but I feel that it was very useful learning curve in how difficult it is to work together in a large group”

“ Yes. I guess all of these. Personally it was a lot about setting myself in a group and understanding my role within the group of international artists; as many of us said, it seemed that we had more understanding with each other than with people that we are connected back in our countries”.

“For “cooperating in the carrying out of cultural and artistic projects” I am not so sure if it was successful, we needed more time for it, and at the end the result was not so good, we were not prepared”

7.- THE FUTURE:

According to the responses the participants see the group working together in the future:

“I think these kind of projects help artist to build up a common language, but not the social environment of Bari because of time wise and the location aspect. It is a bit difficult to see a continuity in this specific place. As far as the new relationships were built and the old ones are strengthen, the continuity can also change its form on the personal levels.”

“The continuity is not to be observed as what we will do as a big group but as what comes out of the workshop in thoughts, working methods, strategies, relationships and so on. Personally I have established a couple of relationships with a couple of persons from the workshop that I’m regularly writing to and meeting. Time will show if some small scale art projects will come out from these relationships. If not it doesn’t matter, we’ve already gained something better: something called friendship.

Thank you all Cittadellarte for giving us the possibility to be able to live this beautiful experience together.”

“Yes. I think that the workshop in Biella was perfect from the beginning until the end, only we needed more time to prepare for the final work (in Bari) and all its details. I’m not sure if a group as big as ours can manage one artistic work in such a small time (we had just few days for our work). Everyone was really happy about Biella workshop and all the people were successfully working together (synergie). This was very important. This means that this way of leading the workshop is very good and you should keep it up.”

It comes clear that these kind of workshops are able to raise awareness of the role an artist has in society:

“Yes. It is essential. But artists have to be responsible about what they do they have to keep the control on what’s happening. They have to decide by their own what to do and how. They have to wonder before starting working in public context if they really want to. Art in general drives to social transformations. This is not an obligation to wonder why, we can only question reality in giving its place to the “Other”; the “other”, it’s everybody that we have to consider as a creator, as an artist.”

“I think projects on art for social transformation should have continuity, they should be ongoing projects that empower people to develop and carry on themselves. Unfortunately I don’t feel like our specific project in Bari was able to carry on once we left, we did not make the right connections with the local people. I think that the friendship we made with the other participants of the workshop will remain and that in the future we could develop successful projects together.”