

Community Art Lab

Creative process in City and Region

Outline of project idea • June 2009

Summary

The Community Art Lab is an Art project focusing on city development. By using cross-sector competencies to find new perspectives in dealing with real challenges in a city, niche solutions and development can take place. The project idea is quite simple: Put together people with different competencies to create a creative process that will be a resource for development and innovation. The base in this project is local authorities, Artists, Art University and other expertise. A process, led by an Artist, is started around a real challenge presented by the authorities in the city. All participants in the process are equally important for creativity to take form; the working method is to work in a long-term cooperation in a group consisting of the different competencies and through the process created catalyze ideas and niche solutions that lead to discussions, transformation, renewal, and innovative methods to deal with challenges.

The first phase is to start a pilot project to test the idea in one or two small European cities and through evaluation form the project. A seminar is planned in the end of the project on the theme “Creative processes as a source for city and regional development?” to share experiences with others in Europe.

The Community Art Lab wants to:

1. Develop a method for city change and development where the base is to combine cross-sector competencies using Artists, Art Universities, local authorities and other expertise.
2. By putting different competencies together, where Artists work with local authorities, start a creative process that will boost creativity that lead to transformation, renewal, discussions and innovative methods to deal with challenges.
3. The method is process-oriented.
4. Build long-term and genuine cooperation on cross-sector competencies in a city or region by using the Community Art Lab as the platform to start from.
5. Work as a learning project. Experiences are developed during the process, this will lead to changes and improvements as the project is running.
6. Start a discussion on Art Universities and with Artists on the role of Artists in Europe today.
7. Work with one or two small cities in Europe in a pilot phase. The experiences can in a later stage be transformed also to work with regional development.

Creative process in City and Region

How can Art and culture be used in community building? How can creative processes be a resource for change and new thinking in cities and regions? How can Artists, Art students and local authorities in cooperation find solutions and possibilities to mutual challenges in a local area? How can students and professors within Art Universities start a discussion of the role of Art, Artistic integrity, cultural and creative thinking?

Many cities, regions and communities struggle with how to start renewal processes according to a globalized society. In Europe the outlines in the Lisbon Agenda puts forward creative industries and the year 2009 is dedicated by the European Commission to focus on innovation and creativity. Specifically small cities around Europe struggle with how to keep inhabitants and attract tourists; make businesses establish offices; fight social issues and how to attract creative and knowledge-intense entrepreneurs. The creative industries is shown to be important for economy, attraction of work force, business, and for well-being. The creative thinking and ability of working in processes used by artists has proved to be an interesting way of tackling these above described challenges. The Art Universities around Europe are in a time of transition. What is the role of Art and culture today? The Artist is often described as being an outsider, it is someone who doesn't want to involve in community work, to be aside of society. But is this true? Many Artists engage in community building and social practice. What is included in the Artistic field, and what is not? How can the area of work for an Artist be enlarged, without endangering the Artistic integrity? Many Art universities face a situation of how to prepare students for the future outside of the educational structure. Can an Artist's competence of processes be an important competence in community building, changes and renewal? The challenge for many cities in Europe is to find solutions on how to transform, which is dependent on their specific situation, inhabitants, surroundings and traditional market. Niche solutions based on a specific local context is necessary. These to different needs could be combined to tackle challenges in new ways; on one hand the role of the Artist and the Artistic competence of working in processes, on the other the challenge for cities to find niche solutions on real challenges something done through long-term process work.

The Community Art Lab is an Art project with the aim to focus on real challenges in a city, region or community, using the competence of Artists and students of Art programmes together with local partners and authorities, to find niche ways of tackling challenges. Projects where Artists use process as a method and work in cooperation with a community have been done before. One example is the very small town of Skoghall in Sweden, where the Artist Jörgen Svensson worked together with other Artists such as Alfredo Jaar, Esther Shalev-Gerz and Paco Cao to put focus on the specific situation in Skoghall. In cooperation with the city council and politicians, the Artists worked with different projects, which in the long run has led to changes in attitude and hope, and also a discussion of the role of Art in the city. The project was called Public Safety and can be found on the Artist website: www.jorgensvensson.se.

The Community Art Lab aim to accomplish two things:

- 1) Work with a real challenge a city is facing and use creative processes by putting cross-sector competencies together, and use this as a resource to find sustainable, genuine and long-term work processes that can lead to actions. The work is done in cooperation with the city council and Art University.
- 2) To start a discussion of the role of Art and culture in the 21st century. What do Artists and faculties pose as the largest possibilities and challenges for the Artist in the future? How does this affect teaching methods, schedule planning, pedagogical ideas and content at Art Universities in Europe?

Community Art Lab

The European network Encatc and the Swedish cultural organisation Nätverkstan together with Swedish Artist Jörgen Svensson have initiated the Community Art Lab. The basis for the idea are experiences of city and regional development in Western Sweden and Värmland. Nätverkstan is a cultural organisation that has run projects, education, medialabs and democracy projects since 1996. The organisation was part of the project team of the South Bank Process, a democracy project to involve inhabitants, cultural organisations and experts in city changes on the south bank side of Göteborg. Nätverkstan is a strategic organisation in the Region Västra Götaland. Jörgen Svensson as an Artist working with several Artistic projects where cross-boarder cooperation has been the base. He has been described as an avant and pioneer within project-based Art having socio-political character. He has run several process-based projects over the years, was involved in Stavanger Cultural Capital in 2008 and is running the project Art + Politics, a project involving Artists and politicians in the Region Västra Götaland. Encatc has since start 1992, been a platform form discussions and development within the area of Art education, Cultural Management and cultural organisations in Europe.

In a first phase, a pilot project is run in one or two selected smaller cities in Europe. The project forms partnership between European Art universities or educational institutions, cultural organisations and networks, and city and regional authorities. A Board of Trustees is formed with representatives from all areas, that will: 1) Act as discussion partner to the project team, 2) Act as Quality Assurance, and 3) Secure that the outcome of the project is documented and evaluated.

A Project Team, consisting of a Project Manager, Process Leader and Project Assistant, runs the Lab. The team members are Artists and cultural entrepreneurs. The team work in close cooperation with selected authorities and Art Universities in the local area chosen for the Community Art Lab.

The Community Art Lab consists of several activities, meetings and milestones.

Pre-study and preparation work. The reference group is formed and formally set with the first meeting. Contacts and networking. A selection process is formed of how to select cities that will be hosting the Community Art Lab.

The five day Laboratory will start the process in the chosen city. The Lab is performed in cooperation between Artist, local Art University, expertise and city and regional authorities. This is an important base for the project, as building relations guarantees a long-term perspective. The Art University bring a selected amount of students and professors, the local authorities representatives. Invited experts and Artists, both locally and from other parts of Europe, take part in the Lab for sharing knowledge, expertise and inspiration, giving input to the process. The group work together on selected real challenges presented by the authorities. The Lab is documented with photos, film and written material. The Project Team organises the Lab together with local partners; the Artist in the team is the Process Leader.

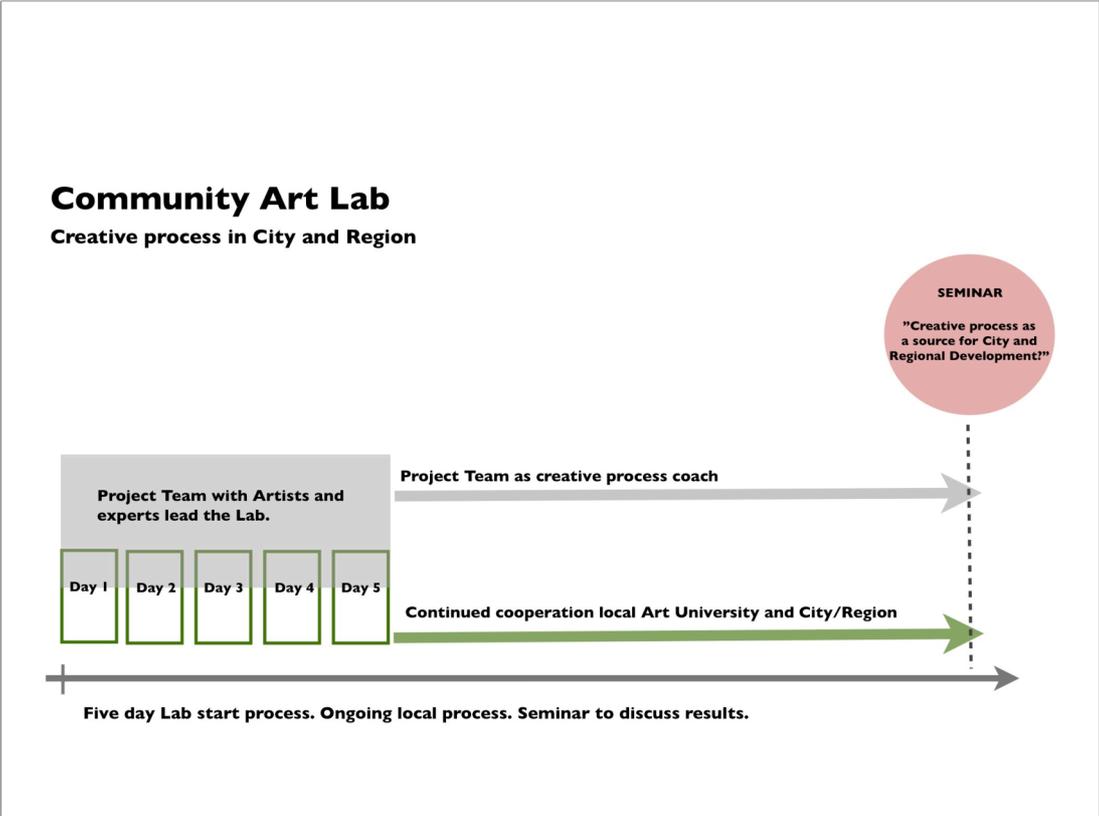
The last day of the Lab, participants **present ideas** of how the working process continues and when a final presentation will be held.

The Project Team acts as **coach and resource** for the local process. After three months a two-day reunion is performed to follow up what has happened, how the process has continued, obstacles and possibilities, and evaluation. Through the evaluation, competence can be added, new ideas or other development of the Lab and local process can be issued.

In a pilot phase, Labs are performed in **one or two small cities in Europe**.

In the end of the pilot phase, **a large seminar** is arranged on the topic **“Creative process as a source for City and Regional Development?”** The aim of the conference is to discuss creativity and creative processes as a tool for development, how to create infrastructure for cities and regions to keep creative talent, and an evaluation of the Community Art Lab project, sharing of the results, knowledge and experience from everyone who has taken part.

Presented in an image the Community Art Lab would look like the following:



Project Organisation

The project is lead by a Project Team, consisting of a Project Manager, Process Leader and Project Assistant. The team members are themselves Artists and cultural entrepreneurs. The team work in close cooperation with selected authorities and Art Universities in the local area chosen for the Community Art Lab.

The team is also working in close connection to the Board of Trustees, which is formed with representatives from funders, Art Universities, cultural organisations and networks, and local authorities in

Europe, with the following responsibilities: 1) Act as discussion partner to the project team, 2) Act as Quality Assurance and 3) Secure that the outcome of the project is documented and evaluated.

Objectives

To develop a method for city development where cross-sector competencies such as Artists, Art Universities, local authorities and other expertise are combined in new ways

To start a creative process and use this as a tool for city development

To start long-term, genuine, and self-sustained cross-over cooperation in cities and regions in Europe

To start a discussion of the role of Art and Artistic competence in 21st century Europe

To start renewal processes and discussions on real challenges faced by a city

To share knowledge and experience of the project in a large seminar in Europe to discuss creative process as a resource for city and regional development

Outcome

The outcomes of the Community Art Lab will be planned and expected ones, but also unexpected. Not everything can be planned. Openness and transparency is part of the Lab, as is flexibility. A creative process is rarely possible to plan from A to Z, it takes its ways. This is something considered in the project, and built in as a resource.

Expected outcomes of the Community Art Lab are:

- 1) Creative processes as a tool for city and regional development in Europe is explored
- 2) The creative process is in focus. A creative process is started by combining different competencies in a group, creativity will be catalyzed by working together.
- 3) Artistic work is process-oriented, rather than product-oriented. How can the Artistic experience of process-based work be used as a competence in renewal processes? The Community Art Lab will explore this question.
- 4) Professional Artists, experts, and students at Art Universities will deal with real challenges in a city. A renewal process will start by using the local knowledge and possibilities, a key factor for successful development.
- 5) Outcome is both short-term; the five-day Community Art Lab is in itself, for many, a different way of working; and long-term, a process will have started with a sustainable and long-term cooperation.
- 6) Cooperation will have started in the local area among partners new to each other.
- 7) It will allow students at Artistic universities to practice their role as Artists on real problems in society and reflect on their Artistic competence.

- 8) Cities where Community Art Lab has been performed, can use their specific creative process as a tool for marketing, start discussions among civil servants and politicians, and start new collaborations.
- 9) If successful, the outcome in the European context is a discussion of creative processes, the role of Art education and Artists in 21st century, how to attract and keep creative talent in a city or region, and the relation between economy, creative industries and Artistic integrity.
- 10) A seminar has been arranged, where all these issues has been discussed, knowledge and experience shared among partners from all over Europe.

Funding

Community Art Lab is planning to apply for European funding in partnership with Educational institutions, Universities, cultural and creative organisations, networks, cities and regions in Europe.

Contact

For more information or taking part in further discussions of realisation of the project, please contact one of the following persons:

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