

"Fly in - fly out" workshop culture

Starting from its own experience, the *microsilions* collective will discuss the format of the "fly-in fly-out project". How does that model influence the conception of a project? How can its conditions of production change the very meaning of a collaborative project? What is its economy? Which alternative could we imagine?

Since 2005, the art/art education collective *microsilions* is developing collaborative projects with different type of participants, either independently or in relationship with institutions.

The working methodology of the collective always changes, in order to adapt to specific situations, but a few things usually remain the same from one project to an other: a small participating group is involved, during a several months long participation and the project ends with the public presentation of a collective work.

microsilions counts only two members but invites external collaborators (artists, designers, sociologists, activists, historians, teachers...) on almost every project.

The knowledge of the local context is key to the development of those projects and a network of teachers, community centers, associations have been slowly built, allowing to find accurate participating groups and collaborators for each projects.

In 2009, *microsilions* proposed to Le Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève (an institution for which the collective has developed several art education projects) to work on an exhibition which would present the work of artists and art educators whose work methodologies are close to their own ones, mixing artistic and pedagogical tools.

Under the title of "Utopia and the Everyday. Between Art and Education", the exhibition was built around the work of two groups of artists and of one art education collective who realized new projects in collaboration with participating groups in Geneva. An important part of the budget was assigned to invite the artists several times, in order to make it possible for them to develop a long term relationship with us, with the local context and, of course, with the participants. Despite that, all of them first pointed out the difficulty of working in an interesting way in a context that they didn't know, in a foreign language and not being able to meet the groups as often as they would have liked.

Each of the guests developed a different strategy to deal with the situation:

1. The Austrian art educators collective *trafo.K* insisted from the start that wanted to work only with a German speaking group. Once such a group was found, they decided to come to Geneva as much as possible to meet the group, installing a real relationship with the participants.
2. Nils Norman, an English artist, immediately said that he was interested in the project but that he would be unable to work in collaboration with a group from Geneva without being based in the city. Therefore, he invited a local artist, Tilo Steireif, to develop the project with him and to work in a closer relationship with the participants. Nils Norman and Tilo Steireif invited a group of teachers to work with them and each teacher extended the network of participation in involving their classes.
3. Damon Rich, from the Centre for Urban Pedagogy based in Brooklyn, invited another artist, Oscar Tuazon. Being invited, as the others, to develop a collaborative project

with a local group, they somehow declined the invitation to come to Geneva before the final installation days, delegating the collaborating part to the curators, who were asked to run interviews and to send them the results.

With that exhibition project, *microsilions* – from the curator point of view – became more conscious of the difficulty of working, as external guests, in a collaborative project. Paradoxically, because this exhibition got some visibility, *microsilions* began to be invited to realize projects abroad.

One of the first question that is asked when such an invitation is made would be “did you already work internationally?”, with the underlying idea that making project in other countries would be a sign of quality. The issue “is it possible to make quality collaborative projects abroad?”, nevertheless, is seldom raised.

Nils Norman, in his piece “A sketch of London” (2007), presents the circulation of money in the English art world, and includes – in connection to his own experience as an artist – “the remote drop project” and “the fly-in fly-out project”.

This idea of a “fly-in fly-out project”, seems to well describe a whole section of today’s art economy. Art institutions and other kind of structures are increasingly interested in inviting artists to develop “community based” projects instead of merely presenting art works. They are usually ready to pay to cover the artists’ expenses and sometimes to support the work itself but, most of the time, they have to limit the number of travels and of work sessions to a minimum, in order to keep the projects in their budget limit.

Time is certainly a key factor in collaborative art projects and working abroad doesn’t seem to favor to extend the time which can be dedicated to a specific collaboration.

In 2010, *microsilions* worked on a very local project called “En commun”, linked to a public park in Geneva. With two classes from the public school, the collective produced a newspaper presenting the history and the diversity of contemporary uses of the park.

Afterwards, the project was critically discussed – especially in the frame of a PhD research at the Chelsea College of Art & Design – and the conclusion was drawn that not enough time could be spent on the project to make the collaboration with the pupils as interesting as it could have been.

For that project, each class has been met six times, for two-hour sessions. There were no travel expenses but, nevertheless, it was already quite difficult to finance twelve working sessions plus the production of the newspaper.

Even without adding the extra hours that would be needed to make such a project fully satisfactory, developing a project like this one abroad would take even more time and would become almost impossible to finance in most of the cases.

Therefore, in developing a project for an “international” context, the conditions of production can change completely the very nature of the collaboration: instead of planning enough time to make a real dialogue possible – to leave some space for the participants to be involved in the conception of the project – there is a risk that the need of time efficiency leads to a strong vertical structure, where the participants just have to execute what the artists have prepare in advance for them, without knowing much about the local context.

If nomadic structures are, in certain contexts, forms of resistance, Temporary Autonomous Zones that can escape from the control of authorities or of the market, the “community based” artist as a nomad worker could become a kind of door-to-door salesperson selling a profitable service into a “time efficient” package.

Which structures could be developed for artists to be able to collaborate and to exchange with people in different places, in avoiding the pitfalls of “the remote drop project” or “the fly-in fly-out project”?

