

Introduction

Art Projects Created in Leytron for *¿Creative Villages?*

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What can the relationship between contemporary art and the creative economy look like? What impact does project-based management have on the art world? What role can contemporary art play in a village and what forms can it take in such a context? These are the kinds of questions that *¿Creative Villages?* sought to answer through programming presented in the village of Leytron, in the heart of the Valais region, from its official opening on March 4, 2016 until the closing event on July 9, 2016.

A series of favourable conditions made the launch of this pilot project possible. Indeed, at a time when the ECAV, École cantonale d'art du Valais, was developing a research project on the presence of contemporary art in rural contexts (as an extension of the *Ars contemporaneus alpinus* project, which took a critical look at the phenomenon of sculpture parks in rural areas), Alexandre Crettenand, municipal councillor of Leytron, proposed that we design a cultural programme for the village's former church. Meanwhile, Pro Helvetia, the Swiss Arts Council, also launched a call for projects as part of its initiative for the development of cultural diversity in rural areas.¹ The proposal that finally reached Alexandre Crettenand, "Creative Villages, a Pilot Project for Contemporary Art in Peripheral Regions" was selected. From the outset, therefore, it was a hybrid project, at once a cultural programme and a research project. Indeed, much like *Ars contemporaneus alpinus*, this project, which originated at the ECAV Research Institute, was largely financed by the HES-SO strategic fund.

1. One of this initiative's main goals was to contribute to the development and dissemination of the cultural production in rural areas and to facilitate networking between cultural agents.

2. The Creative Cities Network was launched by UNESCO in October 2004. Its aim was to defend and promote cultural diversity and to encourage the development of the creative, social and economic potential of local communities. The Creative Cities Network currently has 180 members in 72 countries spanning 7 creative fields: crafts and popular arts, design, film, gastronomy, literature, music and digital arts.

3. Much like the famous "Filippetti Report" in France or the report titled "Le poids de la culture dans l'économie valaisanne" published in 2017 in the Cahiers de l'Observatoire de la Culture.

4. Parallel to the art market, the project economy, which is largely based on the principle of artistic commissioning, focuses on projects that are tailor-made for specific contexts and often also according to specific expectations.

5. All documented here: www.creative-villages.ch.

The Leytron municipality is not an isolated case. As the book *Kunst und Dorf* (2013) by German art historian Brita Polzer demonstrates, more and more contemporary art projects are being set up in villages, particularly with the aim of increasing their attractiveness or solving structural problems. While artists sometimes initiate these projects, many are actively promoted or even planned top-down by institutions or government bodies. It must be said that, in response to the challenges facing rural areas today, more and more tools are being developed at the regional, national and European level to help these regions become more dynamic and competitive. From a creative economy standpoint (of which the *Creative Cities*² network, that inspired the project title, is emblematic), and according to the cultural policies it has engendered, creativity in general, and art in particular, are factors of economic growth and territorial development.

The intention of *¿Creative Villages?* was not to call into question the possible quantifiable benefits of culture, which many studies and reports have attempted to demonstrate.³ Rather, placing the question of the project economy at the centre of the debate,⁴ this pilot programme focused on the effects of such an approach on modes of production, on artistic practices and on the role played by artists in contemporary society. Through its exhibitions, public discussions, interventions in the public space, workshops, artist residency, journal and documentaries,⁵ *¿Creative Villages?* wished to take a closer look at the dynamics of the project economy through the eyes of the actors involved (artists, curators, cultural and political leaders, tourism representatives, local residents, etc.) while proposing cultural opportunities on a regional scale.

In the spirit of Slovak artist and activist Július Koller (1939–2007), for whom the question mark became a signature, we promoted a speculative attitude as opposed to relying on ready-to-use best practice models. Beyond the potential benefits of

6. www.ecav.ch/fr/projets-mini-site/creative-villages/creative-villages-seminar-1141

- Opening of the projects of Carmen Perrin, Fabiana de Barros and Francisco Camacho, on May 20th, 2017.



such a project in terms of image or tourism, *¿Creative Villages?* asked the actors involved to consider the necessity of developing work onsite, the framework conditions of a possible project (whether it be those of *Commune*, *Pro Helvetia* or *¿Creative Villages?*) as well as the artistic choices or practices to be implemented in such a context. As suggested by Dutch art historian Jeroen Boomgaard, who co-organized a workshop started in Leytron⁶, and inspired by Carmen Perrin's experience in Sousa (see her text), the principle behind *¿Creative Villages?* was to allow for the participating cultural agents (curators, artists) to be changed by the place, so that it would guide their choices throughout the process, in an effort to achieve mutual understanding with local residents, should this process be accompanied by friction or misunderstandings.

Although the research processes and results of *¿Creative Villages?* were well-documented in the four issues of the *Journal Creative Villages* and the three documentaries made by Stéphane Darioly (available online at www.creative-villages.ch) and the photographs of Gilbert Vogt, the artistic projects realized in Leytron were only partially documented. This publication partly bridges the gap by taking a closer look at some of its flagship projects, while also providing new perspectives on *¿Creative Villages?* as a whole.

The texts and documents presented here reflect our desire to experiment with a wide range of practices (site specific installations, group exhibitions, performances or interventions, socially engaged approaches, etc.), both in the exhibition space allocated to us by the municipality (the old church) and in the public space. Various artistic projects and the themes they addressed exemplify this desire to build a regional network. This was visible in the work of Ricardo Rivera (MX-US) and Chris Daubert (US), who proposed an installation on the sometimes conflicting relationship between territory and identity, connecting directly with



~ Opening of Fabiana de Barros' *Kiosque à Culture* with Francisco Camoacho's project: *The Art of Sharing*.

~ Chris Daubert and Ricardo Rivera's opening, on June 23th, 2016.

residents and working as close as possible to the local population (be it in the streets, the village church, the cafés, the PostBus or the Ovronnaz thermal baths).

Through her work with *¿Creative Villages?*, artist and curator Maëlle Cornut has contributed greatly to bringing contemporary art closer to the local public. The only instruction given to guest artists was to “interact with the residents of the community.” In this spirit, Nicole Murmann (CH) and Christian Valleise (CH) created a sound performance which was repeated many times in the PostBus linking Leytron to the Ovronnaz station. As for Katerina Samara (GR), she set up a project questioning the notion of identity through taste, which was presented in the *Kiosque à Culture* of artist Fabiana de Barros (BR).

François Dey (CH) was the first artist to be invited to Leytron as part of our artist residency. He was scheduled to stay for three months, but eventually participated in the entire project, making numerous trips that allowed him to immerse himself fully in the local context. His desire to find common ground with the local population led him to focus on music culture, which is central to village life through choirs, bands and festivals. From there, he carried out several projects, presented notably at the opening and closing events of *¿Creative Villages?*.

Fabiana de Barros's *Kiosque à Culture*, which was set up in front of the old church for two months, was also used by another artist in residence, Francisco Camacho (CO) and his collaborator, Alexandre Praz (CH), as part of their socially engaged project *L'Art du partage*. This project gave the local community the opportunity to engage in a gift and trade economy, without currency. *L'art du partage*, which took several different forms in the village, such as classes, markets and events, generated numerous collaborations with local businesses as well as with the HES School of Social Work in Sierre.

As for the *Bem-Te-Vi* installation by Carmen Perrin (BL/CH), which revived a project carried out twenty years earlier, it resonated deeply with *¿Creative Villages?* and concluded it beautifully. Originally organized by artists Jean Stern and Fabiana de Barros, *Oleiro Bem-Te-Vi* (1998) announced the artist residency phenomenon, which can be a source of misunderstandings and even tension. When Carmen Perrin decided to distance herself from this project (see her text), she made a decision that gave her work more focus and meaning. This was a crucial positioning that illustrates our thoughts on project economies, as published in the last issue of the *Journal Creative Villages*.

~ Inauguration of *¿Creative Village?* on March 4th, 2016.

~ Artist Carmen Perrin's opening.



Carmen Perrin's view of the work of brick makers, who perpetuate a vanishing traditional technique, echoes both François Dey's work on the old organ of Leytron (symbol of a community being destroyed by the village's urban sprawl and of a collective memory condemned to oblivion) and that of *¿Creative Villages?* as a whole. More broadly, the pilot project brought to light the many-layered concept of *distance*: distance in time (between a remembered place and contemporary reality), distance in space (between Leytron and the various geographic areas brought together through the artistic projects) and distance in *habitus* (between cultures; between the "world of art" and a so-called "rural community"; between so-called "urban practices" and a so-called "rural lifestyle").

