

THE INDEPENDENTS' VOICE

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Artistic interventions in organisations: an alternative to stimulate innovation

Artistic interventions are very much advocated to spread all over Europe. This is at least how the future seems to look as confirmed by the great interest raised by the final conference of Creative Clash¹. This EU project, on the promotion of artistic interventions, organised an appealing, content wise and well-attended –around a hundred participants– event. Some 20 speakers –EU advisors, politicians, EU regions, producers of artistic interventions, artists, entrepreneurs and researchers– discussed the impact, support schemes and future avenues for this new form of promoting innovation. European personalities engaged in the discussion and were quite receptive to the idea of introducing artistic interventions in the Commission (Xavier Troussard, Head of Unit Cultural Policy and Intercultural Dialogue) or in the European Parliament (Kent Johansson, ALDE and Paul Rübiger, EPP). Agnes Hubert, adviser at the Bureau of European Policy Advisers and expert in social innovation, was clear cut when being asked about the best way to a future where artistic interventions become a usual tool to encourage out of the box thinking and innovation: “by regulation”. Right now, the launch of the Creative Clash- European Network for Artistic Interventions at the close of the event is a first step towards such a future.

Europe is indeed in need of innovation in all sectors of economy and society to overcome economic and social crisis. Most innovation policies focus on enhancing research and scientific driven innovation, but other forms of innovation, using the creative skills of artists, should be considered. “Artistic interventions” in organisations mean bringing people, products and processes from the arts into the workplace.

There is an increasing number of producers of artistic interventions in Europe, such as Tillt in Sweden, c2+i in Spain, Cultuur-Ondernemen in the Netherlands or 3CA in France. They link businesses with artists in order to stimulate innovative thinking and experimentation in enterprises or public bodies.

Artistic intervention is an original form of guidance to organisations wishing to encourage creativity, self development, disruptive thinking, new interactions with a view to making their organisation more effective and productive, better equipped to confront challenges, inspired by increased solidarity and better working conditions.

The concept of artistic intervention is based on the idea that artists have skills to foster innovation in people. Innovations

are sparked off by challenging old ideas and practices and trying out new ones. They require courage and creativity, as well as space for experimentation and reflection. Organisations of all kinds can consciously develop their innovative potential by strategically tapping into well-springs of knowledge outside their established frame of reference and experimenting with creative practices. Some concrete examples of artistic interventions follow:

Artistic intervention increasing efficiency, motivation and corporate culture:

Producer of artistic interventions Tillt, worked with Swedish mineral insulating wool factory Paroc (2000 employees), and the actress and director Victoria Brattström to solve serious communication problems between employees of one of Paroc's production plant.

Within ten months, the artist succeeded through her artistic methods in improving the social atmosphere and communication between employees by letting them produce a photography documentary of their work and workplace. It increased motivation and collective responsibility, and contributed to increased efficiency at the plant.

Artistic intervention improving public service delivery:

The French producer of artistic interventions 3CA helped the public hospital Saint-Antoine in Paris to commission artist Melik Ohanian to create a work of art for the hospital's new emergency services. The medical practitioners wanted to work with an artist to find a way of realising a new health policy that would balance “cure and care”. The artist listened to the staff's desire to create a stimulating environment that would address the anxiety of waiting and offer a moment of contemplation. Recognizing that the patients in this service often lie on stretchers, he focused on the ceiling and designed an arrangement consisting of sixty-nine hanging geometric modules. With a slow and regular cadence the modules shift from one luminescent state to another. Like an imaginary landscape, the work introduces the idea of an expanded space and an on-going motion, which extends beyond the hospital world.



1. The conference was held 19th March this year in the Goethe-Institut in Brussels.

Artistic intervention for product innovation: Grupo i68, a software engineering company in San Sebastián (Spain) that provides customised solutions for management innovation wanted to develop a new interface to access information systems. The producer of artistic interventions Conexiones improbables initiated the collaboration between the company and Paola Tognazzi, choreographer and interactive audiovisual installations designer. She was a good match for the project because her work explores artistic experiences that physically and emotionally involve audiences and encourage the development of sensory awareness. Over a period of 9 months they developed together "Humanising Software" to maximize usability and ergonomics. In order to create an expert system whose intelligence emerges from human exchange and interaction, a system that can learn from and with users, the artist worked with various artistic creative exercises and experiences that fostered and encouraged new perspectives in the R&D process.

Impacts of artistic interventions

Artists are skilled in engaging people's creativity and they can disrupt the established routines, mindsets and management processes, thereby opening space for fresh ways of thinking and acting. Working with artists can help organisations to re-assess themselves with new eyes and to question what they do, how they do it and why they do it. A particular competence of artists is in grappling productively with the uncertainty that is at the heart of innovation. People and teams at all levels in organisations need help in exploring the unknown so that good ideas are not killed off under the pressure to find quick fixes.

The engagement with artists can stimulate individuals and groups at emotional, physical and intellectual levels. The practice of Art creates opportunities for teams to work in

different ways, introducing shared positive experiences within groups.

Artistic interventions do not only impact on the organisations. They also have positive impacts on the artist him/herself, as they help to develop new artistic methods and provide artists with additional work opportunities. They democratise access to culture and stimulate cultural participation. Artistic interventions draw on culture as a catalyst for entrepreneurship and innovation.

KEA has engaged in supporting artistic interventions since 2010. It is part of two European collaboration projects financed by the European Commission's Culture Programme: Creative Clash (www.creativeclash.eu) and Training artists for innovation (TAFI) (www.trainingartistsforinnovation.eu). KEA contributed to raise funding and to making the case for artistic interventions at policy level by drafting policy recommendations². It also established a survey on funding schemes for artistic interventions (in 2011/2012)³ and competences for artists engaging in this type of activity (in 2011).

KEA organised a conference in Warsaw in 2011 to promote artistic intervention in Poland and is prepared to help public authorities and associations to make known the practice with the support of its strong European network of practitioners.

The results of our research assignments show that there is still a lot of room for action to provide effective support to these activities which are a possibility to enhance innovation in Europe.

The Creative Clash Conference held on 19 March at the Goethe-Institut in Brussels provided evidence of the importance of supporting such form of innovation as part of cultural as well as industrial policies.

The TAFI Conference will be held on 9 April at the Delegation of the Basque Country in Brussels.⁴
More info on <http://www.trainingartistsforinnovation.eu>

The KEA Team, 28 March 2013

2. Artistic interventions for innovation, on <http://www.creativeclash.eu/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/AI-for-innovation-en.pdf>.

3. Support schemes for artistic interventions in Europe: a mapping and policy recommendations, available on http://www.creativeclash.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Creative_Clash_Support_Schemes_Vondracek_2013.pdf.

4. Training Artists for Innovation (TAFI) is a unique two year project to investigate creative interventions in business. The project examines the stimulation of innovation and creativity in European businesses through the intervention of artists and creatives. It groups the following partners: Cultuur-Ondernemen (NL), Artlab (DK), Kokos Services (FI), Conexiones Improbables (ES), TILLT (SE), Kunstgreb APS (DK) and KEA (BE).

Since 1999 KEA is a Brussels-based strategic consultancy and research centre providing advice, support and research in relation to creative industries, cultural, entertainment, media and sport sectors. KEA acts as a European hub to foster culture and creative industries and culture-based innovation. It believes in European integration as a visionary project.

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EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

Rue du Trône, 51 • B-1050 Brussels • T +32 (0)2 289 26 00
F +32 (0)2 289 26 06 • www.keanet.eu • www.keablog.com