

# Art Can (Not) Save The World, You Can – Towards a Better Understanding of Art as Collaborative Action within the Process of Urban and Regional Planning

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## 1 ABSTRACT

The region of Eisenerz in the heart of Austria is currently in a state of post-industrial structural change. Migration, abandoned structures, vacancies and shrinking are displacing the centuries-long iron industry boom.

During the Rostfest 2012, an annual art and culture festival that focuses on regional development impacts, the art installation “re-light Eisenerz” was staged in the form of a do-it-yourself water power plant. The energy it generated was used to light an abandoned 18th-century building using LED technology. This joyful project started a dynamic public participation process on the topics of renewable energy production and future cityscapes. It created new perspectives on the city’s resources and a resilient image for the broader region.

The team of oiXplorer<sup>1</sup> is moderating this ongoing art-driven process. Together with local initiatives and citizens the group is currently working on the realization of a prototype, using innovative waterpower technology (gravitation water vortex power plant). The micro-implementation will power the local grid of streetlights and revitalize the vanished industrial water infrastructure of Eisenerz. In this sense, water makes light and light makes community.

In this paper we will, based on our own experiences, discuss the role of art practice related to planning culture. We pose the question of whether art does not replace urban development, but stimulates and pushes it to the next level. The artist might dig it out, but we all make it happen.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of humankind, art has played a significant role in life and is undeniably connected with the way we communicate with each other and our environment. Each culture developed various kinds of artistic practice as part of its spirituality, for example in order to appease their ancestors and nature. Art is seldom used for economic purpose and goes beyond the mere expectations of function. It seems to be the last “open field”, not responsible to anyone, independent and not profit-oriented. Does this mean to say that art is the opposite of a capitalist economy? Can artists point out the ways into a more sustainable future? Does art convince decision-makers to follow those ways?

“Kunst thematisiert, kommentiert und verändert Räume. In den besten Fällen definiert und schafft sie neue Orte.” [“Art deals with, comments on and changes spaces. Sometimes it even defines and creates new places.”] (Claudia Büttner, 2013. p.139.).

Following this notion of art, we find the question as to how arts-based experimental work and engagement reshape cities or regions in the long term? The case of an art project in Eisenerz gives an insight into the process of the reinterpretation and redesign of public space. It shows the advantages and disadvantages of this approach to reinventing spaces by a non-planning process. This reveals findings about the critical role of artists within cities and society

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<sup>1</sup> About oiXplorer: The name is a word creation from English “explore” research and Greek “oikos”, the house, from which later “ecology” and “economy” arised. oiXplorer stands for an independent and open art collective, trying to decipher ecological and economic systems to comment and act. The think-tank & Do-tank was found by Markus Jeschaunig (artist), Claudia Gerhäuser (architect) and Wolfgang Oegg (philosopher) in 2012, based in Graz. Since than oiXplorer realized already several projects in public space. The Arc de Triomphe has been awarded with the environmental award of the city of Graz. [www.oixplorer.blogspot.co.at](http://www.oixplorer.blogspot.co.at)

### 3 ECONOMY, POLITICS AND SOCIETY: ABOUT THE QUESTION OF DEMOCRATIC RESPONSIBILITY

Currently we are at a crucial point regarding the interaction between citizens, state and economy. What was thought to be an equalizing system of mutual control is today structured as a strong vertical hierarchy. Politics are increasingly influenced (and executed) by economy and legal decrees that serve to benefit companies rather than society. Because of the fiscal relief of global enterprises, the financial burden of preserving public institutions and the "state" institution are shifting to the population. The state is increasingly shying away from the responsibility of legally regulating the economic system, leaving the duty of economic survival to the global players – with partly devastating and so far unforeseen consequences for the ecological system and humanity." A primary concern of the original eighteenth-century formulations of free-market economic doctrines by Adam Smith and others was to disentangle the political world and private entrepreneurs from each other, combating in particular the granting monopolies and contracts to court favourites." (Colin Crouch: Post-Democracy. Cambridge, 2004. p. 51.)

After more than 200 years of fighting for equality and democratic rights of participation, we are heading again towards a class society. While the citizens have to carry the main part of the fiscal burden, a small elite in important economic positions has gained access to political power. "Its return is one of the most serious symptoms of the move to post-democracy, as the rise of the corporate elite parallels the decline in the vigor of creative democracy." (p. 52.) Though the populace has to bear the financial responsibility for maintaining the public institutions, it is escaping from the responsibility of participating – like the state, which is following the imperative of the proceeding economization of life by privatizing public services and outsourcing the administration of commons such as public space and common property.

#### 3.1 Invisibility as a weapon: about structures and superstructures

Beyond this, the privatization of public services and common properties implicate the concealment of persons in charge and responsibilities. This becomes apparent when it comes to cloudy and stolid decision-making such as interventions in public space. A certain structure of unconsciousness reveals itself in pushing responsibility onto an individual as well as at a governmental-institutional level from which economical decision-makers profit. Democratic structures preserve at the best a superficial (pseudo-) character and politics assume the form of a blatant spectacle by focusing on short-term goals and headlines instead of contentual information and democratic decision-findings about economical processes such as free trade agreements. The economic system creates an unclear or even invisible superstructure with free trade agreements such as the GATT, the WTO or recently the TTIP, which is long-term intervention in the ecological system. Thus, the free market system – once planned to guarantee the diversity of enterprises and unfolding of individuals – becomes the demiurge of consumers unable to criticize, who are largely unaware of their individual needs. Consumption without information means irresponsibility. The globalization of the market also implies a concealment of relations, origins and ways (including ways of transportation) of production.

Alternative movements criticizing globalization and with a focus on content-based questions about transparency, inclusion or regionality are not heard by politics and considered to be anti-democratic or anti-global. But, as Donatella Della Porta puts it, they are more "new global" than "anti-global" – trying to find alternatives to the neo-liberalistic globalization that concentrate on the future of democracy and sustainable forms of the ecological bases of human life – and deserve to gain critical attention. „Wenn die Demokratie wirklich funktionieren soll, muß zwischen diesen Anforderungen ein Gleichgewicht hergestellt werden. [...] Heute gilt es, den globalen Finanzkapitalismus einzudämmen. Doch wer dies auf der globalen Ebene fordert, verlangt Unmögliches. Der Rahmen internationaler Steuerung, der durch die WTO, die OECD, den Internationalen Währungsfonds (IMF) und – für uns Europäer – durch die Europäische Union vorgegeben wird, bewegt sich genau in die entgegengesetzte Richtung.“ (Colin Crouch, 2008, p.134f.) [If democracy really should happen there has to be a balance between these needs...Currently it is necessary to embank financial capitalism. But demanding on this level means claiming the impossible. The frame for international governance that is set by the WTO, OECD, IMF and – for us as Europeans – by the European Union is moving in the opposite direction.]

#### 4 CREATIVITY AND CRITICAL FACULTY AS ACTION-ORIENTED ANSWER AN ACTION-ORIENTED ANSWER

The French philosopher Bernard Stiegler approaches the problem of the commercial cannibalization of all spheres of life in the course of globalization from the aspect of responsibility. In his disillusioning finding of the current social state of mind, he criticizes the attitude towards responsibility of adults who – in the absence of their own beliefs – foist their children's education off on an educational system that is infiltrated by consumption-oriented mass technologies. Proponents of the capitalist system argue that access to the educational system is – apart from economic growth – one of the great achievements of neo-liberalism. But education does not guarantee a critical faculty – that becomes apparent in the social desolidarization and the uncritical preservation of a system that endangers the future of the natural resources for the following generations.

The unrestrained consumption of the fun society is the enemy of creativity. This does not mean artistic creativity, but creative thinking in general. To obtain a critical faculty, a personal point of view is required that is based on the creation of a self-image. The autonomous ability to act (and with this also responsibility) assumes creative thinking that is spatialized through the action and as a consequence becomes responsibility. Marketing machineries and mass technologies aim exactly at this point: before one comes to the creation of a self-image (self-determination, autonomy), heteronomy starts to guide the desire. Desire (as the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan says) is unconscious of its object – it first has to create it. But if the advertising industries work on controlling our desires (and not the wishes resulting from it), we never come into the situation to intervene creatively in our environment – and as a consequence we are losing our responsibility and the achievements of the Enlightenment. The lifeworld we live in is an expression of our ability to symbolize and of technical-technological achievements. This is precisely why we have the possibility to co-create the world and why we achieve improvements – and why we are not biologically and/or culturally determined living beings.

##### 4.1 Art as remedy?

Art cares increasingly about the education of the mind, since educational institutions (including universities) have made it their business to ensure a frictional cycle and supply on every educational level for preserving the system (even educational institutions – especially universities and colleges – increasingly depend on private research funds). The artist has the option to act with a particular independence and impartiality, because artistic work – with a few exceptions – still is an uneconomised field. In this sense, art is a field of experimentation under laboratory conditions, where it is possible to try out new sceneries and to reveal invisible, unconscious processes. Under these conditions, art must ignore social conventions and legal acts to create a new mental world made of ingredients that build our realities to serve (the) unquestioned for public interest. Dialectically opposing the current system (and dialectical knowledge always needs a counterpart) can initiate negotiations about the reality as a common, public good – that is exactly what is meant by responsibility and democracy.

#### 5 FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE – THE EXAMPLE

“In immerwährender Bewegung wandeln die Wasser aus den tiefsten Tiefen der Meere zu den höchsten Gipfeln der Berge, wobei sie die Natur des Schweren missachten; ... Wenn das Wasser aus einer geplatzten Ader der Erde heraustritt, folgt es der Natur der anderen Dinge, die schwerer sind als Luft, und strebt deswegen immer nach den tiefer gelegenen Orten.” [With endless movement the waters shift from the deepest depths of the oceans to the highest heights of the mountains, whilst not respecting the nature of gravity; ... if water bulges form the burst veins of earth, it follows other guidance, heavier than air, and longs therefore always towards the lower sites.] Leonardo da Vinci, Leicester Codex (Marianne Schneider, 1996. p.7.)

"Re-Light Eisenerz" is an artproject that demonstrates a critical approach towards our environmental reality. It is not dominated by the common regulations of public life and properties. This temporary artproject was realized without the need to compromise. It became an enriching experience in terms of direct democracy, by integrating specific location characteristics, the direct environment and by cooperating with local citizens. The visualization of the sources of water and electric energy – everyday energy resources – created points of identification for locals and visitors

### **5.1 Town of Eisenerz – post-industrial change**

In the near future, Eisenerz will change into a post-industrial and almost post-democratic region. Migration, abandoned structures, vacancies and shrinking are displacing the centuries-long iron industry boom.

### **5.2 Demographic change in the region**

Formerly the heart of Austrian industry, Eisenerz changed with globalization and the technical optimization of economy. Although the average amount of mined iron stayed nearly the same, less man-power is needed nowadays. Since the middle of the 20th century, Eisenerz has therefore shrunk dramatically – from a peak of 13000 in 1950 to around 4800 today. At 52 years, Eisenerz has – beside its neighboring town Vordernberg – the highest average age in Austria. Those facts are a result of more than 40 years of the process of decline in Eisenerz. (cf. W. Nussmüller, R. Pichler, R. Rosegger, 2006. p.4.)

### **5.3 Situation in Eisenerz today**

Eisenerz is located on a high plateau within the lower parts of the Alps, in the middle of the Styrian mountain region, with mountains of 2200 m height. It lies at the foot of the impressive iron-mountain – the source of some of the best iron ore in Europe. Tourist attractions in the region are the Leopoldsteinersee and the Gesäuse National Park, both very impressive natural landscapes. Besides sports and fossil resources, Eisenerz offers very little other structural potential except for tourist attractions. These branches of the economy are not capable of compensating for the lack of jobs and financial hedges caused by the optimized iron ore mining. Without a doubt the topographic situation, the high age of the local population and therefore the low visitor frequency in the town leads to empty shops and streets, the departure of young locals and a very low birthrate. Visible signs are decorated fake shop windows, which convey a non-existing virility on the surface. All other empty windows seem to be blackholes into an unknown future. Eisenerz is a Potemkin place of our times.

### **5.4 Local challenges**

The iron ore reservoirs might last a few decades more, until all economically viable siderite deposits are depleted. Perspectives like this have turned Eisenerz into the most studied city in Austria. Investors, universities, students, experts in tourism or in sociology, environmental planners and even scientists of future have come to study Eisenerz and suggest ways out of the growing crisis. „Der Großteil der Studien befasst sich mit dem zentralen Paradigma des Wirtschaftswachstum, als Garant für soziale Kohärenz: der Wirtschaftsstandort als möglicher Motor der Bevölkerungsentwicklung.“ [Most of the studies deal with the central paradigm of economical growth as a guarantee for social coherency: business location as a potential engine of population development] (W. Nussmüller, R. Pichler, R. Rosegger, 2006. p.5.) Meanwhile it is generally acknowledged that conventional approaches of planning, data interpretations and prognoses of growing will not work with the structures of such destabilized cities.

### **5.5 Global challenges**

Statistics about climate change, about the increased and excessive shortage of resources and the worldwide lack of commitment to reducing national and global energy consumption are no secret at all. Companies with a focus on economic growth and fossil-based industries seem to be expanding even further. The lifestyle of western society is still seen as ideal and serves as inspiration for fast-growing regions in the world. Technical innovations support the development of new-regenerative energy sources or they optimize the efficiency of existing ones. In the context of a growing world population, it is surprisingly hard to convey the need to reduce energy consumption, to offer solid living conditions to more of us and to following generations. Within a comparably short period of time, changes in our living conditions and environments will force us to turn around and to change direction.

At the beginning of the Anthropocene, we face changes in global structures such as the demand for power, our working conditions and production processes. In the eyes of Harald Welzer, we are challenged to “...ein historisch ungeheuer erfolgreiches gesellschaftliches Modell so umzubauen, dass wir die zentralen Errungenschaften bewahren und zugleich den Ressourcenverbrauch radikal absenken, [darum]kommen wir um die Erkenntnis nicht herum, dass die Transformation der Gesellschaft unweigerlich die Transformation unseres eigenen Lebens ist: ...die Veränderung der konkreten Praxis, also die Veränderung der Mobilität, der

Ernährung, des Arbeitens, der Freizeit, des Wohnens...”[...transform a historic and very successful model of society in such a way that we will not lose its central achievements yet still radically reduce energyconsumption. Thus we are confronted with the finding that the transformation of society will inevitable transform our lives: ...the change of practice, thus the change of mobility, of diet, of labor, leisure time, of housing...] (Harald Welzer, 2013. p.131.)

Because of the world’s growing population, shrinking processes seem very abstract and paradoxical. Individual and place-specific solutions on a micro-level have emerged as effective methods for dealing with the situation. That implies for Eisenerz – being representative of places of demographic change – reduction and loss instead of growth and development should be the focus.

### **5.6 Overcoming Rost – What comes after shrinking?**

What kinds of options are suitable for those places? Can the spiral of shrinking find an end? Could re-branding of the region be an answer? Could one see shrinking as a concept, and force the de-building towards lower infrastructural costs and to densify social networks? Could art-based strategies help to find suitable ways for dealing with the situation?

### **5.7 Initiatives and Agencies in Eisenerz**

Beside investments in established branches such as mining, tourism and sports – for example new investments in the Nordic ski-jumping hill and training center – plans for some extraordinary and internationally substantial tunneling research facilities are on their way.

In Vordernberg – a neighboring town – a center for immigration detainees pending deportation was built, whose location has been discussed and shifted for years all over Austria.

Smaller private protagonists reflect the regions identity. The Erzbergbräu, the first private brewery and bar-on-demand, was the idea of an Eisenerz-born IT-developer who lives part-time in Vienna. It is an important place for the city’s social life.

Cultural input comes with the eventseries „eisenerZ\*ART“, which offers a regional cultural program and works with the city’s rich historic past and the impressive geographical environment. Projects like a montanepformance with Caterpillars and Dancers in the iron ore mine are part of the program and there are screenings of historic documentations about traditional iron mining.

In 2012 the “Rostfest” took place in Eisenerz for the first time. It aims to combine a festival with urban and regional development

#### **5.7.1 “Rostfest” – between festival and urban development**

Like a musicfestival or similar to the raveparties of the 1990s, which occupied abandoned locations temporarily, the Rostfest aims to revitalize the “rusted” city. The aim is to generate sustainable impulses in an understandable and approachable way. “Das Rostfest will die Stadt am Fuße des Erzberges nicht als Kulisse nützen. Vielmehr wird das Rostfest mit den Eisenerzerinnen und Eisenerzern gefeiert”, [The Rostfest doesn’t want to use the city at the bottom of the Erzberg as a kind of movie-set. Primarily it is celebrated together with the locals], according to the Rostfest organisers. Urban camping in empty apartments, concerts in an abandoned dance location, Heavy-Metalmorning-beer together with the local Metal-Label or cake and coffee with the regional hunter-ladies are some of the events around the Rostfest. International and regional artists have been invited to work with the public space in the city and to exhibit in the empty but historically valuable Fisikatenhaus. The local bars and restaurants are integrated into the program with a nightline and extra events. As a mixture of block party and city-experiment, it is an extraordinary event of celebration. With the potential of the local economy and companies and the temporary use of open or empty spaces within the city, visitors from Vienna, Graz and all of Austria come to Eisenerz – at least once a year, for a few days.

## **6 ART PROJECT "RE-LIGHT EISENERZ" – PHASE ONE**

For the first time, oiXplorer became active players in Eisenerz with their art-project “Re-light Eisenerz” within the context of the Rostfest 2012.

## 6.1 oiXplorer

The oiXplorer team works with the following background: It seeks to bring the two divergent systems of economy and ecology closer together. Infinite growth is unrealistic in a world of limited resources. The import of fossil energy is not an option, because of those limitations. Regional and regenerative energy production is therefore necessary to cover the world's energy demands. Each of us is responsible for becoming part of this transition. Decentralized energy production systems should be structure-focused and aesthetically integrated into our urban and rural environments.

## 6.2 Initial situation of "re-light Eisenerz"

oiXplorer raised the question of how to visualize - by artistic strategies - new potentials of the structurally altered town of Eisenerz. They started with the abandoned building of the Fisikatenhaus, which was lacking electricity, but offered a vibrant stream with waterfalls in its backyard: the Trofengbach. Besides the mining of iron ore, the power of the city's streams were identified by this, as sustainable but long forgotten. oiXplorer's answer came as a temporary light installation made from recycled materials. It used the Trofengbach to generate the missing power (electric energy). Local craftsmen, stakeholders and neighbors were mobilized at the Rostfest to help to illuminate the 18th-century building for three days.

Applied resources: water – Trofengbach; wood, truck & drill – local spatial decorating firm; waterwheel & generator; food – farm shop; welding work – mechanic on site; V-Belts – vacancy; bicycles – Loan of municipal lost property office; Know How & timber formwork – carpenter from neighborhood;

In this setting, a construction carpenter met with festival people to build the structure together. Mutual help, enthusiasm for the idea of producing electricity and improvisation skills were substantial for the project. Neighbors watching the event told stories about the history of the place. They also discussed their ideas about renewable energy and its implementation in their town. A rush of knowledge, actions and experiences of collaboration among citizens were developed – the principal of shared work thematized and intensified the topic of identification with the place for all project participants. Awareness of the formerly abandoned spatial resource was created as well, as citizens showed their commitment in supporting ideas and developments that bring visible change. Intuitively (with only basic knowledge about the local situation) people took advantage together of something that has been present in Eisenerz for a long time – hydropower. Old types of blast furnaces, mills, tanneries and farms used only water power and dominated the visual and audible cityscape. Although these wheels and buildings have disappeared, the old infrastructure of waterfalls, barrages and flooders still exist in the streams.

The relatively small, unbiased project evolved into a dynamic process of natural and direct participation on the topic of renewable energies and future urbanity. Surprisingly quickly, neighbors and residents accessed the idea of installing an "inner-city water power plant" in Eisenerz. In this sense, oiXplorer had used an art project to create a future vision, and inspired further ideas

## 7 FROM THE ART INSTALLATION TO A COMMUNAL LIGHT PROJECT – PHASE TWO

During the festival of Rostfest the question was raised as to whether the Trofengbach could regain its old function and in the long run serve as an economic hydropower site, as well the question as to whether and how such a plant could be financed as a common project and build "citizen power plant Trofengbach"? How can one implement decentralized energy production in areas of inhabited urban space? A further task had been raised: How can a short-term temporary art installation be transformed into a project with a long-term horizon?

At the Rostfest, the idea was proposed of using the Trofengbach in its old function as sustainable waterpower and an economically viable site. How could one do that today? How would such a civic power plant be funded, how would it be built? In general, it is a question of how to implement sites of energy production in residential housing areas and historic city centers. With these questions, the next step in the project process became tangible: How could one turn a temporary art project into a communal project with long-term perspectives?

### **7.1 Short-term and long-term perspectives**

Austria is the country with the third largest hydropower potential in Europe. From a long-term perspective the implementation and reactivation of waterpower in the historic town of Eisenerz is conceivable. Since the project is not meant to be transferred to third parties (external planners), oiXplorer started working on an alternative process. This is time-consuming, but the strength of it lies in the interaction of all participants. It seemed to be easier to initiate the renegotiation of commons (public property) and their management in this way, rather than going the established way of planning and top-down implementations.

### **7.2 Technical innovation: Gravitation water vortex power plant (GWVPP)**

The company Zotlöterer has developed a small but innovative hydropower technology. The "Gravitation water vortex power plant" is a vertical turbine type in an open and circular basin, propelled by the water's current. Small altitude differences, simple implementation and ecological fish permeability are key advantages for a wide range of applications. The first completed projects have shown that small organisms and fish even like to settle at the pool's edges because the water swirl increases the concentration of oxygen and provides appropriate microclimates. In this way already regulated streams can be upgraded to a higher ecological category by supplementing several swirls. Thus the basins along the riverbanks bring back the positive ecological effects of the - largely vanished - former meandered rivers

### **7.3 Advantages of an energy sculpture**

Public lighting is a medium that is available to all residents on a daily basis. The principle idea of an energy sculpture is to sensitize the public by experiencing waterpower and visualizing energy quantities. Compared with conventional systems, gravitation water vortex technology does not cover the moving mechanical parts. Showing the motion and transformation from water to power through an engaging light-installation in the middle of the city center changes energy into something that we are able to perceive with our senses.

Most important in communicating the concept of this energy sculpture is the visibility of the turbine. The visibility of energy production is substantial to a coherent promotion of decentralized and self-sufficient energy supply systems. A small hydropower plant can be integrated into the urban fabric and "revitalize" old streams. The historic town merges with an innovation of the ecological future.

### **7.4 Aesthetic Innovation: Designing a communal light-project**

New power for Eisenerz: The greenelectricity provided directly powers the public streetlights. It becomes visible in the form of a characteristic light mood. During the day, the power generated will be fed into the public electricity network. In the evening "re-Lights" (specially designed street lamps) illuminate public spaces in the town center in a soft light color. The stronger the force of the water actually is, the more re-Lights light up and increase the light radius in the city (idea: Light as amplifier in public space). Some design component indicate whether the respective lamp takes power straight from waterpower or from the public grid.

### **7.5 Prosumer – Citizens become producers**

The project design involves citizens - financially, with their own labor, with material or knowledge. The do-it-yourself energy leads from passive consumers to active producers. The operation of the hydropower plant could be administered in the form of an energy cooperative. Seeing and experiencing day-by-day one's own achievement creates awareness of energy amounts and power consumption

## **8 PROCESS EXPERIENCES**

After the clear artistic impulse, the conventional approach to planning was considered in order to implement the vision. A lack of knowledge about alternatives became the driving force for further steps in the process. In a team, two by two, experts and administrative institutions were visited in order to integrate them into the process. Always focused on a holistic understanding of the project and on the aim of including ecological, technological and design aspects, subsequent decisions about contacts and what to do (e.g. on an authorization level), were developed gradually. This kept the process open for the unexpected and flexible for feedback, on one hand. On the other hand, this way of working kept stalling because some steps proved to be not helpful or a failure. After an investigative phase it turned out that none of the residents were



involved any more. Does this call the approach into question? Basically, the moderation is still in the hands of oiXplorer. Meanwhile, a constant back and forth between lively network and sporadic work arose.

General insecurity arises from the financing/funding situation. Market value and investor interests had been tested during the application procedure for an economic start-up grant. It became apparent that for a promotion at this level a different project orientation and status are necessary. It also became clear that by building trust within a business development, the countable benefits are substantial. In the work on site, no such profit calculations were necessary. Basically this dilemma confronts oiXplorer with the need to promote themselves and to create a visible market value. This is in contradiction to their social demands.

Those process experiences increased the discussion about values. Why is it difficult to explain that light, visible/available to anybody, can work as an economic alternative currency and why is it complicated to convey that there is no wish for a prime investor?

## 9 SOCIETY, ART AND PLANNING

“The artist shows the unknown with the known” (Friedrich Kiesler). The role of art practice related to planning culture needs to be discussed based on our own experiences. We pose the question as to whether art, instead of replacing urban development, stimulates it and pushes it to the next level. The artist might dig it out and act as an explorer.

### 9.1 Artists as independent players - how does that work?

Mainly by spending time on site and by approaching locals in the “Re-Light Eisenerz” project, water as a formerly common source of energy was rediscovered. The way oiXplorer approached the situation and the Eisenerz residents, we would now say, was the key to all following developments. OiXplorer started to implement a clear concept of a small do-it-yourself water-plant without any further concerns: visible facts were safely established. Because it was art creation, some major difficulties in planning and some of the bureaucratic regulations could be temporarily taken out of consideration. A faster workflow and a more open realization procedure only by “doing” were established. This led to rapid mode of operation in which decisions could be taken directly during the realization (implementation) - without complicated planning in advance. In that sense, oiXplorer made visible a different idea of commons, ownership and common ground. People in the town suddenly had points of connection with which to approach us, to help out with materials, their own expertise and infrastructure, such as tools or transportation. Collaboration was supported (not forced) and grew into an open but multi-layered network, which turned out to be more viable and stable than the art installation itself. Muf, a London-based studio, uses similar strategies to redevelop and redefine destabilized areas of British Labor settlements: “The Relationship: Paradoxically, in order to make the thing, the collaboration has to be about the making of the relationship rather about the object.” (muf, 2000)

The power of artists lies in their independence and their time and creative hands-on mentality. They need to receive economic forces like money, materials, labor or technical expertise from others. In Eisenerz oiXplorer has been able to engage others to contribute with those resources. They work like agencies instead of being artists working more or less isolated on their own oeuvre.

Artist’s force: time without money

Investor’s force: money without time

Communal force: management, negotiation experiences and conflict management

## 10 REFLECTION & CONCLUSION

“Das Konzept der Commons: Die Commons können gemeinschaftliche und generationenübergreifende Güter sein, wie Artenvielfalt, Wasser, Atmosphäre, genetische Ressourcen, Boden, Saatgut, Wissen, Ideen, kulturelle Vielfalt usw. [...] Sie sind das Netz, das die produktiven, reproduktiven und kreativen Prozesse auf unserem Planeten stützt. Sie sind oder sie beschaffen uns die Mittel, uns zu ernähren, zu kommunizieren, uns zu bilden und uns fort zu bewegen, sie nehmen sogar die Rückstände unseres Konsums auf. Die Vielfältigkeit und Vitalität der Commons stellen den Schlüssel dar, den wir benötigen, um zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts den Veränderungen unserer Zeit entgegenzutreten zu können.” (Ingrid Spiller, 2009.)

Currently, managing these public properties is more a matter of individual interests than of representing the spirit of commons. Water is a common, nevertheless it is administered by small, elite units. The word "rival"



(Latin: rivus: brook, stream) for example, arose only because mills wanted to use the power of water on the same shore. Because of a lack of distance they mutually held back the waterflow. That situation created the need for legal and independent guidance through the arising conflicts. Administration meant the responsibility to manage conflicts in a fair way. Over time this actual core competence of communal administration got lost in a prevention-oriented bureaucracy of regulations, standards and regulatory requirements.

It would be necessary again to step back and call for a fair handling of diverse interests at administrative levels. New negotiations on the management of commons, whether they are water, public space or the urban fabric, would be necessary for this. In particular, it is time to focus on the following questions:

- What participation in existing, ongoing and planning structures looks like?
- What is actually the situation of the relation between planning and democracy?
- Could an artist (or an independently operating individual) overcome to a certain degree the requirements of an administration environment?
- Could one question, recollect or change the legal framework by rejecting it or by "do-not-ask-what-is-legal"?
- Could one raise awareness for legal frameworks, question them and shift them with the action of overcoming them and with the attitude of "non-demands-if-something-is-allowed"?



Fig. 1: View of Eisenerz with Erzberg, 2012 (photo: Alex Koch)

Fig. 2: Re-Light Eisenerz, light-installation with DIY water power plant, Rostfest 2012 (photo: Alex Koch)

Artists can indeed act in this way, because they reveal that criticisable rules are limiting social action. They create interaction, which is simultaneously connective, a dialogue and associative. This may have an effect where legal action would not be authorized anymore. If collaboration and successive tasks have been generated, a process starts, which is supported and controlled by the participation of more than a small ruling elite. The project in Eisenerz is a collaboration that caused changes in the relation between locals and the site. oiXplorer has created reference points where interested people can build on their own skills and ideas. This work happens without general tasks, but specific ones are developed for each of the participants during work. Certainly, the size of the evolving network plays a role. What constitutes a "maximum size" still needs to be identified. Currently, a critical mass has not been reached. It shows as well that one does not want to "save the world", but seeks to change manageable parts of it.

The primary contribution of an artist in planning processes can be seen in the elaboration of taskfields within a thematic framework. Inspiration (e.g. by the way, how work happens) seems essential for any realization.

Supposing that the artist shows "the unknown with the known", e.g. regarding global challenges, possible solutions for a sustainable future - does that say that the world can be saved? The artist cannot compensate for what society neglects to do. He/she cannot take the role of a "superhero" who saves the life environment before irreparable damage increases. Rather he/she is part of changes. Those cannot happen in isolation, they

require the active engagement of anybody - policy-makers, entrepreneurs, politicians and citizens. Together – WE can save the world.

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