

The RAMI 14.0

MOULTAQAYAT ALEXANDRIA

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What is the role of art in the process of societal change?

The example of "Garden Jet d'eau" Sicap – Dakar »

with Ndèye Mané Touré and Marta Vallejo, curators, collectif Kër Thioossane/Dakar

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ما هو دور الفن في آليات التغيير في المجتمعات؟

مثال «Garden Jet d'Eau/ Sicap at Dakar» لـ Ndèye Mané Touré و Marta Vallejo
أعضاء Kër Thioossane داکار.

The Role of Art in the Processes of Changes in Society

The panel on the role of art in social change and transformation was presented by Marta Vallejo and Ndeye Mane Toure. They mainly focused on the work they have been doing with the art center Ker Thioossane in Dakar, Senegal. Ker Thioossane (Ker means 'house' in Wolof , one of the widely spoken languages in Senegal and 'thioossane' means both "tradition" and "culture") was established by Francois Sylla and Marion Louisgrand Sylla in 2002. Francois who is a musician, grew up in the house and had the idea to turn it into an art center that directly engages with the community. Marion who worked in France for years, involved in networks of independent cultural spaces, met Francois and the idea establishing Ker Thioossane was developed. From its inception, the space was conceived to provide African artists with technological tools that promotes multimedia practices and community participation across the continent, in addition to working on South-South exchange. The guiding principle was open source and creative commons concepts, where free sources could be used and developed further instead of just being "consumed" as an end product by passive users.

<http://www.ker-thioossane.org/spip.php?article10>

Both Marta and Ndeye discussed the many projects that the center was involved in and the ways that it engages with the community. The experience of the center has been to try to find sustainable models for the use of technology in artistic practices and at the same time that helps develop the community. As expected that is one of the most challenging aspects for most initiatives trying to engender an organic, grassroots approach to sustainable practices and community engagement.

For example, the project of the "Ecole des Communs", which attempts at establishing an alternative school of shared resources and interdisciplinary practices and methods which involves scientists, artists, researchers, economists, environmentalist, all members of the community working together towards a shared space for reflection and development. The school came as a response to a need to alternative knowledge creation. The challenges faced at every step of the way ranged from bureaucratic harassment, to trying to find ways to engage the community, to fostering the idea of shared public space and finally how to pool resources in a context where scarcity is self-evident.

<http://www.ker-thioossane.org/spip.php?article7>

Another example, one of these projects is the Jerrycan workshop, that was done in the framework of the festival Afro-pixel #4. The idea behind which, is to reassemble the parts of old computers into a Jerrycan, using technology recycling and installing free, open source software that can be used by everyone.
<http://www.ker-thiossane.org/spip.php?article197>

Ndeye also shared an interesting idea of how to build economic model in a context like Ker Thiossane. She distributed money notes, that were made especially for the center by Mamadou Ciss, and termed Afro-pixel currency. The currency can be used in an innovative way: members of the community are invited to participate in helping with any of the projects at the center and they are paid in this currency, which they can then use to access any of the resources and services that the center offers. While this economic model is still a work-in-progress, Ndeye stressed that it is an idea that they are exploring and that, even if it does not work, it opens the possibility for other models to develop. The main objective of the AfroPixel currency is to contribute to visualize those non-economic contributions that keep communities alive.

Claudine Dussollier then raised the question of the relationship between all these projects and their impact or relation to multimedia practices for artists and members of the community. And interesting debate followed, where questions on what is a community, how can we foster trust within a community, and what kind of model that would actually work in the context of Egypt. Hadil Nazmi talked about the notion of exchange that goes beyond the “monetary currency”, a sort of “barter-exchange” art economy, where instead of exchanging products or commodities, we would exchange artistic expertise or resources. Mohamed Youssef tried to explain the idea of exchange that does not fall within the “currency-exchange” system, and that adheres to the barter-economy model persisted in the countryside in Egypt till 1970s or so. Yet, according to Nabil Boutros, who commented by saying that such a model, barter-exchange, or resources-sharing requires a specific process of community building that might not be present at the moment. And that there is a need to think of ways of how to create such a community in the light of the contemporary reality.

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<http://ramimed.com/Moultaqayat-RAMI-14-0-Alexandrie.html>

