

NGO, Practice and University Driven Research By Design on Performative Wood

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(insert Figure 1 here)

Fig1. Loop pavilion; Light Performance: Lunchmeat; Dance Performance: Jana Vrána (Photo: Dvořák 2014)

Abstract:

The present paper discusses the possibilities of a relationship between academy, NGOs and practice in Research by Design on the case study of the first author's PhD research in performative wood and chairing of NGO Collaborative Collective, o.s. [1] The more common link to commercial practice in this case might not reach the goal due to the long lasting sampling and prototyping compare to the timeframe of commercial projects. On the other side, academy is often not as flexible as small NGOs in its organisation and goals. While, in this case, the academic research is focused on responsive wood material, design and environmental science, the NGO can link this with society, culture, education and popularisation of science. By doing so, the project is reaching higher complexity, connecting art, science and public life. Within this project, two Environmental Summer Pavilions, pareSITE [2] and LOOP [3], have been built in the city centre of Prague and hosted multi-genres festivals, reSITE [4] and EnviroCity [5], related to public space during summer 2013 and 2014, respectively. The pavilions themselves relate to hot and dry summer city environments by absorbing moisture at night, when the relative humidity is high and evaporating it during arid summer noon of the Prague city centre, thus pleasing the stay of festivals' visitors.

Introduction:

Lately, it is getting more common to establish NGO next to the academic research, to create a stage for experimental practice as an alternative to practise based research conducted in e.g. a design company. This model was pioneered amongst others by Ocean, starting as a network in 1994 and registered as Ocean Design Research Association in 2008[6]. In 2010, a special issue of FORMakademisk was released, discussing research related to design or otherwise. In this issue Sevaldson maps out a long range of definitions, concepts and approaches in practice research in design with emphasis on the relations between design practice and research [7]

Most of these perspectives are more or less meant to be linked to professional practice. This has been discussed by Dunin-Woyseth and Nilsson:

'Grillner and Stahl also presented a sketch to map the different sites where practice-based research in architecture may be related both to more conventional 'professional' practices as well as to alternative, 'academic' practices, meaning experimental practices based in academia and pursued through teaching, exhibitions and publications.' [8]

The potentials in linking practice research to NGOs is not discussed. However, this discussion takes already into consideration not only the education and academic results, but also the popularisation of science, in the case of exhibitions. Different modes of research have been discussed by Koskinen et. al. And conceptualized as the lab, the field and the gallery [9]. The special setup with research by design involving NGOs in the cultural field might be ideal for combining the three modes of research mentioned.

The first author is taking this idea forward, by examining how research by design can benefit from a relation to a NGO. By exposing her collaboratively built prototypes, to a living public space, as a central stage of multi-genres festivals on and in public space, organized by the NGOs. The audience is attracted by the cultural events while, in the same time the prototypes are tested by the performers.

The Method of Cooperation between Academy, Practice and NGO:

The first author originally planned to link her research with her own practise, but she didn't reach that goal. Though the work is based on one to one scale prototyping that should be applied in building industry, the time frame and targeted resources did not fit. Due to that fact, she founded an NGO, Collaborative Collective, o.s. [1] with the colleagues from her practise [1]. There is a close link between the member's practises and the collective especially as an arena for speculation of future applications. The Collaborative Collective, and the architectural practises are presented in public as one unit and they use the same facilities. Thus the practise and the NGO get attention from different target groups, which leads them to more financial recourses and popularisation of the work. At the same time, the research has been conducted as PhD research at different institutions. During the realisation of two of the Environmental Summer Pavilions prototypes, the cooperation between the Faculty of Forestry and Wood Sciences at the Czech University of Life Sciences [10], Architectural Institute Prague [11] and the Faculty of Art and Architecture at the Technical University in Liberec [12] was established as a research based design studio course lead by the

author and her collaborators. Parallel to this, the private sponsorships for the materials and outsource CNC, etc. were arranged through NGOs as well as all the festivals' events and organisation. The sponsorship is easier due to the fact, that the academy has more complex administrative responsibilities, therefore a small NGO is more flexible, at least when it comes to the laws in the Czech Republic.

The festivals were public, not targeted to science or academic education in the first place. Various performance artists, musicians, VJs and DJs, anthropologists, urban planners and designers, architects and landscape architects, theoreticians and city gamers were invited to perform an event of their wish that preferably relates to both, the pavilion, as well as to the surrounding public space. By perceiving the expressions coming from different disciplines, the authors of the prototypes got the opportunity to see their work in different perspective. The first author's research, as well as the development of the pavilions with all the participants was in both of the cases presented and introduced at the opening of the pavilions as a first festival event before the light, music and dance performances to the public.

The first pavilion, pareSITE [2], was built for a bigger event reSITE [4] festival and conference, ran by the NGO with the same name, where Collaborative Collective [1] cooperated as a small part of the big event's sister arrangement in public space, while a big un-public conference was held as a main interest of reSITE NGO. It was concluded by both sides, that such a constellation was not suited for both of the partners, as their aims and audiences differ. Therefore the festival EnviroCity [5] for the LOOP pavilion [3] was fully ran by Collaborative Collective and managed by Michaela Kernová and the first author with technical and financing support of the Prague Institute of Planning and Development [13] and Landscape Festival Prague [14] as co-organisers.

(insert Figure 2 here)

Fig 2. Loop pavilion; Light Performance: Lunchmeat (photo: Dvořák 2014)

(insert Figure 3 here)

Fig 3. pareSITE pavilion; Dance Performance: Antonie Svobodová (Photo: Vajdová 2013)

(insert Figure 4 here)

Fig 4. pareSITE pavilion; Dance Performance: Nami Maria Halington (Photo: Vajdová 2013)

(insert Figure 5 here)

Fig 5. Various Performances, Lectures, Workshops and City Games at EnviroCity Festival at Both its Locations (Photo: Novotná 2014)

(insert Figure 6 here)

Fig 6. Action Diagram Mapping the Project Of LOOP Pavilion and EnviroCity Festival (Graphics: Davidová 2015)

Discussion:

pareSITE pavilion on reSITE Festival, navigating complex networking problems:

The pareSITE pavilion was part of the author's PhD studies at the Academy of Art, Architecture and Design in Prague [15]. As the structure of this institution did not enable her to lead a studio course there, she made an agreement with a private school, Architectural Institute Prague (ARCHIP) on holding a visiting studio at their institution. The cooperation with reSITE NGO helped in the negotiations, as both of the organisations are linked through the dean being the founding member of NGO at the same time. However, as ARCHIP had already confirmed its study plan, we were given only half a semester for the task. The original plan of the author was that the course will involve students from various schools, which was cancelled by the argument of ARCHIP that their students pay study fee as opposed to the students from state schools, therefore the course cannot be open to them. As the initial agenda had addressed also the other students, the students from the Faculty of Forestry and Wood Sciences at the Czech University of Life Sciences got very enthusiastic and discussed the options for joining the course with their school management. It is sympathetic fact, that the first author's long lasting cooperation with the faculty was initiated by their students, who arranged the first meeting. The school offered their specialists and workshop equipment, both necessary for the project, as the transdisciplinarity of the proposal was very attractive to them. All the materials were covered by ARCHIP's major sponsor, SKANSKA and the design part was conducted in ARCHIP's studio spaces. The schools signed the contract on their transdisciplinary cooperation for the project. The salaries of the tutors were covered by reSITE and the first author received a stipend through Collaborative Collective sponsorship application from Lesy České Republiky (Czech State Forests). reSITE is a big transdisciplinary conference and has its festival as a small public event on the side of its main activities. This caused several failures. For them, our project was insignificant compared to their larger activities and responsibilities to their sponsors. The positive fact about the cooperation was that the organizers were very open to first author's ideas and she took large part in the festival concept. The unfortunate fact was that the cooperation was very difficult as the conference and festival were happening simultaneously and the first author and members of Collaborative Collective ended up volunteering for the festival's success without rights on decision making or any PR. Same difficult situation emerged with large sponsors, who supported the conference, but wanted to be exposed at the festival, as it

addressed the public, with cheap, but larger attractions, overshadowing the pavilion, though it was the only stage of the festival.

Lessons were learned. It was definitely not enough to agree on only a half semester lasting studio course for such project, but that time, it was our only option. The cooperation with reSITE brought an insight into the festival organizing but we learned that it is not suitable to be a small add-on of a big event. The conclusion of reSITE not to split their energy into small events seems to support the theory. The organization could have been better through establishing for instance discussion groups for all the participants with phone notifications as was done in the second case. Most likely, as all the participants were new to such large partnership, the organization was very chaotic and stressful. Thanks to this cooperation we learned how to create such projects in the future. The festival itself was very successful. Happening at largest square in Prague, Karlovo Square, it hosted about 1600 visitors just during the weekend [16]. The pavilion concept was not affected by the robust organization and the performance was experienced by many visitors due to the extent of the event. The sponsors were decently engraved to pavilion's panels as it was explained to them, that this way, they get the best PR from city sensitive Prague citizens.

LOOP Pavilion at the Festival EnviroCity:

This project largely benefited from the learned lessons. The PhD studies moved to the Faculty of Architecture at the Czech Technical University in Prague [17] and the author was offered to host a whole semester studio course at the Faculty of Art and Architecture at the Technical University in Liberec. The same cooperation contract was signed with the Faculty of Forestry and Wood Sciences at the Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague. The studio had to be better organized, as the students were living in different cities. In addition to regular meetings with physical GIGA-map for coordinating team work, an online file sharing offered by Copy and a private Face Book group was established [18]. The author decided to organize the festival, as well as the material and research sponsorship through Collaborative Collective, o.s. due to the conclusions drawn from the previous experience that this can better serve the project's goals. As for the materials small local companies were engaged as suppliers of the materials, at the end Stora Enso was sponsor for the wood, Rothoblaas for the joinery and EuroDach for CNC. It seems, that larger companies can better afford research/or PR. Smaller sponsorship was covered by smaller local companies such as tools landing by Náfadí Bartoš and moving of the materials and pavilion from site to site by Natura Décor and Easy Moving. The research stipend was again sponsored though Collaborative Collective from Lesy České Republiky (Czech State Forests).

The festival's concept was addressing the research questions of the first author, while adapting to later agreed co-organizers' who had to submit to the already created concept. The project management and coordination of the cultural program was conducted by Collaborative Collective's client Michaela Kernová, who has been connected to their practice for a long time, through collaborations with the author. Graphic design was sponsored by Škuta Design with creating strong CI. A private Face Book group was arranged for the management of the organizers and volunteers. As the Collaborative Collective was founded as a civic association for research and innovation within the field of architecture [1] the NGO could also apply for grants for the dancers and musicians, because they related to research in architecture by the performance. The site, technology, facilities and partly PR was covered by the co-organizers, the Prague Institute of Planning and Development (IPR) and the Landscape Festival Prague. The cooperation between the two differed. While IPR is state institution run by the city municipality, the Landscape Festival is run by architectural gallery, Galerie Jaroslava Frágnera. While the gallery was more free and dynamic, the state institution had more possibilities, in case it came to agreement with appropriate person, such as covering the commercials on city trams. Thanks to the previous experience, the project was organized in less stressful, agile and light weight way while lasting much longer, though new lessons were learned by different settings. Thanks to the whole semester studio course, we could create more complex projects and increase the performance of previous pavilion (elaborated in separate paper for the conference). Involving a professional project manager and cultural program coordinator brought much stronger seriousness to the festival and secured its smooth process. The professional coordinator working for Collaborative Collective was also following and fulfilling the needs of the partial research goals, gained through observing and questioning an interaction with the pavilion and public space by performers from different disciplines, as well as by the visitors. Many were really targeting the connection and were getting attached to the object and its closest environment as close as possible by all their senses. The dancers were eager to explore its materiality and form in relation to the ground by laying under it or climbing it while expressively touching and smelling it or receiving its energy. The landscape architects were impressed by the humidity and fresh, wood smelling, air circulation inside of the prototype. Musicians were exploring its shape-material acoustics. The city gamers used its space for room division or board for notes, while the architectural historians used it as a meeting point for their city walks. Two different locations, one covered by greenery at IPR's gardens, the second rough at the suburbs at Freight Depot of Žižkov brought different perspective to environmental conditions of the object both, by different constellations, especially of the ground, as well as through different aesthetics. The employees in the location used it periodically for lunch breaks, commenting on its pleasant environment and expressing their worry it might be removed. It was of course loved by kids for their spatial games. It is the main author's experience from both of the cases that placing a beautiful object into a public space never leads to vandalism.

As it was its first year, we consider EnviroCity festival as successful. It reached over 800 visitors during the summer 2014. Over one hundred visitors came to the festival opening at IPR's gardens. From engraving the sponsors' logos on the panels we created an attractive offer that was a gift to the donors after pavilion's disassembly.

It seems the NGO can function as a bridge or glue between different interests because of its non-profit organization. The action diagram of Loop and EnviroCity management organisation shows clearly the NGO as the central point while all the institutions benefit from the cooperation. During the process it seemed to be proved, that small NGO with no profit ambitions

is more flexible and can be seen as a caring and kind spider in the net. On the other side, the larger, more powerful organisations operate with better resources and opportunities. However, it is strongly beneficial when most of the administration is left on the NGO.

Conclusions:

The cooperation between a NGO and the universities worked perfectly, probably for the reason of one person sitting at both places. It has been proven that for some purposes organisations that are less and for some purposes organisations that are more complex are suitable. Without any of the type of them, even without the minor part of the practice, the project wouldn't happen.

When cooperating with different types of the organisations, it is possible to reach different goals, audiences, as well as financial resources. The parts that are almost impossible to solve for one organization are very easy for others..

The introduction of NGO's to Research by Design is necessary for reaching better disciplinary complexity of the projects and thus design-research results, perceived by the authors in all the fields. Especially the dance performers were very enthusiastic about receiving new inputs from the relation of dance, material – environmental – body interaction through architectural object, public space, music; and light performance, when applicable. Similar feeling was experienced by the authors of the pavilion, seeing the performers in action. The landscape architects were very sensitively commenting the pleasant humid environment with beautiful smell of wood in hot summer days in the city centre of Prague. It is very difficult to explain the experience of observation as it happens in near or totally subliminal level. The interaction of materiality and environmental conditions, together with the enactment of the performers and visitors, made all experience the exploration of strong feelings.

The introduction of the research field of performative wood to the public, as well as to the performers and presenters, reached its audience even among people who wouldn't consider it as their focus of interest. The discussion with such people enriched the views of all of us.

It is more suitable to keep autonomy within organisation, not in the transdisciplinarity. While the first might lack the understanding for certain purposes, the second needs the equality for bringing benefits of particular field to the discussion.

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