

Since 1993 on invitation from different institutions, the artist group WochenKlausur develops concrete proposals aimed at small, but nevertheless effective improvements to socio-political deficiencies. Proceeding even further and invariably translating these proposals into action, artistic creativity is no longer seen as a formal act but as an intervention into society.

Art and Sociopolitical Intervention

In the context of many twentieth-century artists who understood how to actively take part in the shaping of society, WochenKlausur sees art as an opportunity for achieving long-term improvements in human coexistence. There is no difference between artists who do their best to paint pictures and those who do their best to solve social problems with clearly fixed boundaries. Artists' competence in finding creative solutions, traditionally utilized in shaping materials, can just as well be applied in all areas of society: in ecology, education or city planning. There are problems everywhere that cannot be solved using conventional approaches and are thus suitable subjects. The individually selected task, like the painter's self-defined objective, must only be precisely articulated. Interventionist art can only be effective when the problem to be solved is clearly stated.

The Group

It all started in 1993. Within the normal time span of an exhibition at the Vienna Secession Wolfgang Zingg invited eight artists to work on solving a localized problem. The group was to work in closed session to develop and realize a small but concrete measure to improve conditions for homeless people. 18 projects have been realized since then with over 40 artists participating in these projects. The core group of the WochenKlausur are artists who have all participated in multiple projects. The team changes and expands depending on the project.

Working Principles

The prerequisite for every intervention is the invitation of an art institution, which provides WochenKlausur with an infrastructural framework and cultural capital. The exhibition space itself serves as a studio from which the intervention is conducted. The name WochenKlausur could be translated as "weeks of closure". The German word Klausur is related to the English words enclosure or cloister. The group's projects are collective efforts that take place in the concentrated atmosphere of a closed-session working situation. A strictly limited timeframe gives rise to an unusual concentration of the participants' energies, allowing the planned interventions to be realized very quickly. The issue to be addressed is usually established before the project begins. The realization of the projects thus often requires cunning strategies and trickery. When a project has been completed, it is possible to observe whether its objectives have been achieved. It is then the task of the critic to compare the intention with the rest.

WochenKlausur

Interventions

Aid Homeless People / Vienna / 1993 The first WochenKlausur project succeeded in making medical care available to homeless people. Since then a mobile clinic has provided care to more than 600 patients monthly free of charge and without insurance vouchers.

Shelters for drug dependent women / Zürich / 1994 A facility was created where drug-addicted women who earn their money through prostitution can sleep, relax and seek counseling. The shelter ran for six years at full capacity.

Social Situation of Elderly People / Civitella d'Agliano / 1994 For the Italian community, in which more than a third of the population is over the age of sixty, a communication center with an adjoining bocce court was opened.

Integrate Refugees / Graz / 1995 WochenKlausur conducted a project concerning immigration policy. Seven immigrants lacking residency permits were registered as artists. The project assured the participants legal residency in Austria.

School / Vienna / 1996 In cooperating with pupils, teachers and parents new furnishings were designed and built, the walls were redecorated, and the lighting was improved.

Deportation Detention Facility / Salzburg / 1996 WochenKlausur created a coordinating agency that provides social and legal services to the inmates in the deportation detention at the Salzburg Police Detention Center.

Community Development / Ottensheim / 1998 The population was involved in the community's political decision-making process. WochenKlausur started groups relating to issues of local interest.

Labor Market Policy / Berlin / 1998 The high unemployment rate in Berlin Kreuzberg led the group to establish an alternative employment office. They offer advice and support to people who had new ideas for work that utilizes their skills and interests.

Future of Work / Linz / 1998 WochenKlausur founded a Recycling Co-operative connecting designers with industry, which provided the material for new useful objects.

Language Schools in Macedonia / Venedig / 1999 For the 48th Biennale, WochenKlausur, in response to the catastrophic effects of the war in the Balkans established a network of language schools in Macedonia and Kosovo.

Alternative learning in Japanese Schools / Fukuoka / 2000 In order to support the practical aspects of studying WochenKlausur established a Non-Profit Organization that offers a wide range of "Learning by doing" projects to the schools of Kyushu.

public area intervention / Krems / 2000 Together with the population of Krems, WochenKlausur organized suggestions for the Pfarrplatz in order to increase its attractiveness.

Public Debate / Nürnberg / 2000 Skillfully arranged discussions - always closed to the public - with two participants (one from each conflicting party) together with one mediator, were to provide help in situations where negotiations had broken down or disputes had become emotionally charged and hardened.

from place to place / Styria / 2001 A team of scientists drove through Austria elaborating ideas for community development.

Voting Systems / Stockholm / 2002 WochenKlausur held fictitious parliamentary elections with different possibilities of voting. There was the possibility of negative voting, which meant that a party could be voted out of parliament.

Activities for Mentally Disabled / Graz / 2003 WochenKlausur developed a year-long program of activities for older people with severe mental disabilities.

garbage / Wien / 2003 A workshop was established in Vienna to help former drug abusers again find self-confidence and enjoyment in useful occupation. After successfully completing therapy, the participants work at transforming worn-out furniture and unwanted objects into new products.

Perception of Subcultures / Helsingborg / 2003 WochenKlausur established a platform for presentations for different cultures in the region to be better perceived and accepted.

from place to place

strategy

WochenKlausur approached a number of Austrian towns and offered to conceptualize and realize proposals for improving the community's quality of life. Seven municipalities agreed to participate in the project. An "expedition troop" spent four days at each of these locations. During this period, the team of experts assembled from a variety of areas of cultural landscape research (architecture, city planning, sociology, agricultural sciences, environmental technology) spread out and did some "exploring."

The project was structured in two phases: in a two-month preparatory period and a one-month project phase. In the preparatory period everything was concentrated on putting together a suitable team, obtaining invitations from communities, and adapting the travel vehicle and field headquarters to the challenges posed by the project. WochenKlausur met with more than twenty interested scientists in their effort to put together a team of ten suitable participants. Before the project's start, two meetings were held to give team members a chance to get to know one another, discuss the endeavor's approach and clarify the "rules of the game."

An all-terrain vehicle customized for the project and equipped with laptops, printers, telephone, fax, internet, cameras, recording equipment, telescope etc. was posted in the town's central square at each project stop. It served as the base camp and laboratory, and it also offered the community's residents an opportunity to obtain information about the project from the scientists and WochenKlausur activists. Before departure for the next stop, the team's results were presented to the town council and the public. The analyses and ideas were intended to provide not only impetus for new development,

In 2001 the project "From Place to Place" pursued a new form of cooperation between art and science. This co-operation had to produce tangible benefits. The team of artists and scientists drove

town proposals

Gleibsbach

> restore the banks of the creek and increase their value as an aesthetic and recreational resource



Hohenau a.d.Maach

> create a bike path along the highway within the city limits to ensure the safety of bicyclists
> build bus-stop shelters
> find a new use for the former sugar factory
> create an optical narrowing at the points where traffic enters the town to slow traffic by producing a "gate effect"
> provide more shade and a water source in the vicinity of



Laa a.d.Thaya

> provide a bike path that is isolated from automobile traffic in the area around the traffic circle
> establish a plantation for studying and developing the Wiechula technique in the



Friedberg

> widen the sidewalks to 1.5 m; sink the curb at pedestrian crossings
> improve the central square's retail spectrum through the targeted attraction of businesses to vacant storefronts
> make more use of rainwater for irrigation



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through Austria in a mobile lab, spending four days in seven towns. During this period, ideas for community development were elaborated and then presented to the town council.

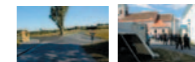
Retz

> incorporate wind energy technology in planning
> establish a barter system (e.g. "exchange harvest help for fruit" or "garden maintenance for use rights")
> systematically decrease the language barrier to the neighboring Czech Republic through pupil exchanges
> intensify rail service between Retz and the Czech



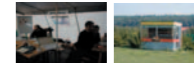
St. Magdalena

> plant deciduous trees, which would be more appropriate than the existing pines and spruces in



Greinbach

> take the community's overall appearance into account and preserve old structures in future building projects
> enter into a waste-water treatment plant maintenance cooperative with neighboring communities
> clearly mark the intersections of hiking trails
> document and renovate the old building fabric that gives the town its character



participating artists: Pascal Jeannée (project leader), Oliver Schmid, Mathias Klau/Participating Scientists: Norbert Bacher (Landscape and Garden Design), Claudia Dankl (Landscape Planning, Cultural Landscape Research), Andrea Hubin (Art History and Art Education), Wolfgang Fichna (Historian), Helmut Lang (Cultural Technology and Energy Technology), Andrea Mann (Spatial Planning and Regional Studies), Alexander Risse (Tourism Research), Heide-Maria Schatzl (Landscape Design), Andreas Zingg (Spatial Planning and Regional Studies);