

Shaking Hans – Winner of the N.I.C.E. Award 2013

The brief The Shaking Hans project is described below and your brief is to elaborate the idea and its programming more fully, but by keeping its core intentions and goals and its spirit. In essence your task is put some flesh on the bones and to make it relevant to your community. How it came about is thus described in some detail so that you get a sense of how it evolved.

The project NICE is the Network for Innovation in Culture and Creativity and at the Forum Avignon-Ruhr on the 27th and 28th June 2013, held at the famous rejuvenated Zeche Zollverien in Essen, it instigated an imaginative experiment to create a speed co-innovation competition. There were four teams of 10 people each coming from different age groups, different countries and backgrounds. They were each given a topic to consider that had been developed through consultation with younger people in the Ruhr a few months earlier. They concerned the economy, the environment, intercultural issues and urban space. Each team had an international expert to guide the process with the help of a facilitator. They had 5-hours to think through an idea and within that time to create a physical manifestation of the project. The teams gathered at the end of the day in a room full of materials to create something out of pieces of wood and metal, Styrofoam, string, wool, paints, cartons, paper, chairs, pallets, the odd wheel and general garbage.

The following day each team had to present their project in any way they wished ranging from a simple description to a play. Shaking Hans, a project about urban space presented its idea involving all the participants and got the most votes so won the award from a mixed audience of 220+ people made up of public officials, creative economy and other professionals and social activists.

The Shaking Hans team was led by Charles Landry and the team comprised amongst others a guerrilla gardener from Sweden, a Dutch architect, a specialist in public media screens from Berlin, a theatre producer from the Ruhr, a Lithuanian creative economy expert and an artist of Bosnian origin.

The urban space team concentrated on a question: ‘How can we increase the recognition by the public and decision makers of the value of creative projects and processes’. The challenge for the group was to create an idea that could be interesting enough to influence people to appreciate the positive impacts of imaginative projects for urban development and community building.

To begin the process of imagining someone in public space we created a stereotype. This was Hans (it could have been a woman too). Hans tends to be inward looking, he is somewhat sceptical about connecting, he tends to be a bit prejudiced, he is slightly self-

satisfied and complacent. He is a big consumer and is a part of that culture of entitlement. He expects others to provide for him. He is not a shaper, maker or co-creator of his evolving city. Crucially there is a Hans in all of us.

The challenge we set ourselves was to convince our Hans to be less sceptical about getting involved in urban life and engaging with his community in order to increase his trust and confidence in other people to the benefit of all. In addition the idea needed to be catalytic, replicable, scalable, flexible and relatively easy to do.

Then the team had really got going and ideas started flowing. On large scale sheets there were ideas, slogans and phrases and what shone out was the notion of bringing Hans out of himself and this formed the core of the project encapsulated in the slogan 'From the familiar to the unfamiliar'. His favourite room at home would be transferred, as a longer term art installation, to a public space. It might start with his sitting room or bedroom and then the installation might grow to incorporate his kitchen. To launch the project our Hans (cajoled and persuaded to take part) would be there interacting with the public for a weekend and then other Hans stereotypes might take over. With a kitchen this transferred domestic space could become a temporary café. There could be associated events, from the humorous to the serious, small workshops, shared music performances and more to discuss the power and potential of the public realm. The core idea can developed in numerous ways including inviting the general public could be invited to shape

As we left to physically build our project idea someone said this a 'celebrating sceptics' project and then another shouted its 'Shaking Hans'. That was it, this was the title with its implied double meaning of both shaking Hans into having a consciousness about the importance of public space and then too that interacting in the public realm is about a minimum of two people symbolically shaking hands.

The physical model was centred on two chairs stuck together on a wooden pallet representing the inward looking and the transformed Hans as well as large ball of wool roughly 200 metres long. In the performance in a dialogue the old Hans described why he as he is – inward-looking and uninterested - and the new Hans described his transformation process as a more engaged citizen triggered by the interest of the public in him. As this dialogue is going on the wool slowly goes around the auditorium connecting the project group and each member to each other symbolically representing the notion of shared public space.

Charles Landry 6th August 2013