

# Slow down, please.

*Cima Città*

A manual for encounter and artistic collaboration.

This is not yet a publication.

Master Transdisziplinarität, January 2023, Lea Loeb











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# Introduction

*About this publication*

## *This is not a book*

This publication is not a theoretical essay on artistic or creative collaboration. Much has already been written about that topic.

This is a practical instruction manual, a toolkit for artistic collaboration on the example of the Cima Città residency program. This publication does not claim to be complete. This means that not all artists' collectives and groups who have ever worked together at Cima Città will have a voice here and not every aspect of collaboration that happens on site can be documented here.

This is a selection, an insight.

Partly this is due to the fact that this publication is being written in the fifth year of the residency program's existence.

It is also important to note that these practical insights into concrete collaboration tools and scores are not useful for everyone. That they have been created in a very specific context and therefore do not claim to be universally applicable.

No conclusive tips are to be given here. And there is no intention to judge the relevance of different tools within the toolkit or to propose a hierarchy between them. This is just a collection of insights. They are arranged by my research questions and the structure of this publication.

At best, these examples encourage other groups and collectives to reflect on their own structure of collaboration and communication. Or they inspire imitation – which would very much meet the purpose of this publication.

This publication can be read anywhere, of course. But it is written for and about the collaboration at Cima Città. It is imagined and conceived from here and for here.

So, if possible, this toolkit should be applied on the site of Cima Città.

## *Who and when*

This publication has many authors. I began doing interviews in the fall of 2022 with residents who had spent time at Cima Città that year. I asked them about their experiences in terms of working and creating together on site. I also developed a questionnaire that I sent to some residents after their stay on site. I further plan to visit individual groups during their stays starting in spring 2023 and document their working methods. The contributions that will be printed in this publication will be very different in their perspective, language, interests and focus. It will be a collection of reports, narrations, experiences and instructions.

Furthermore, the publication should not only consist of texts, but also contain pictures, drawings, sketches, diagrams, music scores, etc.. These will also come from different contributors and will therefore differ in style among each other.

I am giving this publication a structure to set a starting point.

However, this structure should and will blur or dissolve altogether as more contributions are added. I do not want to anticipate any content.

This publication will be created over the course of the next few years. I expect a final version to be printed in 2025. This publication is not about or for me. It's meant to document a variety of different approaches to artistic collaboration in the context of the specific working environment of Cima Città.

It's meant to inspire.

*To help gather content for this publication, I framed this year's call for supported residencies 2023 around my research questions. The call for projects reads as follows:*

We work together, we share knowledge and we network. We co-manage and co-curate, we are team players. Nothing new so far. But how do we do that, exactly?

How does creative collaboration work and how does it feel?

One thing can be observed in almost all collective creative processes: we slow down.

And that's exactly the point we find exciting.

Deceleration. We need time to develop ideas together, to communicate, to evolve together.

Do we make better decisions when we decide collaboratively and more slowly?

Much of the project work and (artistic) research at Cima Città takes place in teams or collectives. It's time to take a closer look at the different approaches of collective and creative collaboration. We are interested in your approaches, your thoughts and experiences with collective decision making.

How do you listen to each other, how do you learn from each other, how do you organize yourselves?

What are the ground rules you give yourselves and each other to create something together?

What role does the (non-human) environment play in these processes? And what do you appreciate about deceleration?

We are looking forward to all project ideas that deal with these questions!

*Research questions*

In the case of an applied project, it's not quite easy to pick out one part or one research question. What do you focus on?

There are many points about the Cima Città residency program that I could have explored or questioned within the framework of this Master Thesis. I was in fact interested in many different aspects and it took me a long while to decide on an approach, to focus on a subject within the project. I was interested in the curatorial setting for example. The role of the host as a curatorial figure. Or the topic of caring and being cared for. Or questioning the meaning and purpose of artist residencies as a concept within the international art market would also have interested me.

What has in the end intrigued and fascinated me the most from the beginning of my professional career, is artistic collaboration.

The second theme I chose (for me strongly related to the first) is the idea of deceleration as a product but perhaps also a requirement for artistic collaboration.

Collaboration can have very different facets and manifestations. Sure, most people somehow collaborate and co-create in teams. For example, they work in a team with other employees. They work together, communicate and consult with each other, etc. The setting and framework is in that case clearly defined by the employer or customer.

Although there might be parallels, the situation is different when it comes to artistic collaboration and co-creation.

I myself have always worked in teams. In self-organized collectives, as here in the case of Cima Città, or in institutional contexts.

There are also many creative moments in my work. Moments of creating ideas and projects together. But these creative moments are different from the ones I am interested in talking about here.

For this publication, I am most interested in artistic collaboration and co-creation in the field of independent art making. By this I mean two things: first, I am talking here about groups and collectives that understand what they do as art. Furthermore they should not be bound to any institution and not work on a commission basis.



## *Artistic collaboration*

There are many artists who work in groups, teams or collectives. In some disciplines this is more common than in others.

In music, for example, or in theater or film. There, by definition, it is hardly possible to be creative alone. (The exception here would be, for example, compositional work, writing a script or a play.) In the performing art forms, as soon as they enter the phase of realization, it is therefore common that the work is created collectively.

However, to this day, this is often not appropriately acknowledged. It is true that a great deal has changed in this respect in the past twenty years. Management collectives of cultural institutions have become the norm, and artists are increasingly presenting themselves as collectives. Nevertheless, to this day we usually only know the name of the director of a piece or a film. How exactly the work came about and whose artistic signature characterizes the final outcome of the work cannot usually be identified from the outside. This publication is about looking precisely where one otherwise has no insight: into the intimate levels of artistic collaboration and co-creation.

I am interested in how such collaboration and collective creation happens. What is it like when there is more than one author of a work? How does co-creation work in practice? How does it look like? What does it feel like? Does creation happen differently together than alone?

I believe that Cima Città is an excellent testing ground for gaining insights into these processes. I'm very excited to see what comes together over the course of this collection of content.

## *Deceleration*

It is in the nature of artistic residencies that they mark a time-out. A (physical) distance from everyday life, from the workplace and familiar environments. In the best case, the distance gained leads to more concentration and more focus on a project. Things are suddenly possible that would never be in the everyday setting. An artistic residency marks a break, a pause. This leads to a different evaluation of one's own work, of the interaction in a group or collective. In the best case, blockades can loosen-up and/or the new environment has an inspiring effect on the content to be worked on. What I can say for sure from the many feedbacks I receive since the beginning of the residency program, is that this change of perspective is very much appreciated. Residents report very concentrated work phases, new inspiration, unusual intimacy in groups and collectives, new encounters that in turn initiate new topics and questions. And something else is often mentioned: the deceleration felt by many.

On the one hand, this can be explained by the distance from the familiar surroundings and the everyday concerns that are eliminated in the new environment. There is simply more time for working on a project. However, what I also conclude from all of the feedback is that the described deceleration also has a lot to do with the specific location, the area and the surroundings of Cima Città.

Investigating this deceleration as a phenomenon in itself excites me.

What is it about this place that triggers precisely these feelings in so many people (including myself)?

And the next question that interests me as a research question for this publication project, is whether artistic collaboration as such does lead to a certain deceleration.

The hypothesis would be: artistic collaboration forces deceleration. Because artistic collaboration requires a lot of communication and agreement. And that takes time. On the surface, this thesis is relatively easy to justify.

But can it be verified in the course of content generation for this publication? And what does it mean? What might be concluded from it? Can it be stated, for example, that collectively created projects have a different quality? How could this ever be measured? And, should the quality be better, is it because of the deceleration of the decision-making or not rather because the decisions were made by more than one person?

These questions fascinate me very much. They will accompany my work on this publication in the coming years.

I'm trying to apply deceleration to my work on this publication as well. A task that is not easy for me. But the point is that the publication doesn't just come from me, that the content has many authors.

So it's not on me to decide on the timeline myself. As soon as there is more content, perhaps some things about this publication will have to be reworked, the concept may become obsolete or have to be completely rethought.

And that would be a good thing.



*About Cima Città*

## *How it works*

Cima Città has been hosting guests and residents since spring 2019. These come from very different contexts and disciplines and with very different ideas and expectations. And they visit Cima Città under different conditions.

Cima Città is a residence program organized as an association that rents part of a disused chocolate factory in Valle di Blenio for association purposes.

The heart of the residency place is the former workers' house with seven bedrooms and various living and working spaces.

Furthermore, Cima Città includes a large vegetable garden on the premises, a piece of forest with a river, a music room, a workshop and two studios. In addition, Cima Città can use large industrial halls on the premises by arrangement.

The association is financed by rental income and by donations from foundations. Cima Città operates from February to November and invites guests to work on site. Often several projects and teams are working parallel at Cima Città and share the infrastructure. Most of the residents come from Switzerland, but from all parts of the country. Many also come from neighboring European countries.

The project team is not always on site.

The residents are largely taken care of remotely.

The chocolate factory site is located between two villages. There is a grocery store and a pub in the nearby village. There are a few neighbors on the site.

There are three residence models :

Rent

Supported residencies

Invites

### *Rent*

Groups, individual artists, collectives, associations or universities can rent the residence for project work, workshops, retreats, working weeks, research weeks, etc.

The rental price differs depending on whether independent artists have to pay the rent themselves or whether, for example, an organization backs them. Partner organizations that rent annually are Migros Kulturprozent, Sonart, Pro Helvetia, F&F, HSLU, ETH ZH, etc. The rentals last from a minimum of three nights to a maximum of four weeks.

### *Supported residencies*

Every year Cima Città invites a number of projects. The selected projects pay no rent and receive additional financial support for travel and materials. The duration of these residencies is two weeks. The projects are selected through a public call for applications.

From the applications, a number of projects, usually between four and eight per year (depending on the association's budget), are selected by an external jury. The calls are theme-based, but address all disciplines, as well as inter- and transdisciplinary projects from Switzerland and Europe.

### *Invites*

Invites work similarly to supported residencies. These projects also do not pay rent and receive additional support. The Invites format is primarily aimed at activist projects.

## *How it all started*

The residency program Cima Città started in a LAB of the Master Transdisciplinarity at ZHdK. In the fall semester of 2018, I wrote a first concept for a residency program in the disused chocolate factory Cima Norma in the Valle di Blenio in Ticino as part of Jens Badura's Creative Alps LAB. The concept was a thought experiment. I had already done a two-month project in this very chocolate factory in 2016 and still felt connected to the place. What if?

What if, in the long term, a place for interdisciplinary residencies were to be created on the site of the disused factory? A place for experiments, without production pressure, a place for visions. And for encounters. An inviting, inspiring and (relatively) freely designable place in the alpine periphery. Far away from urban logics and yet free of chalet chic and alpine romanticism. The location seemed to me perfectly suited for this: an abandoned, spectacular and unique-looking industrial site in a non-touristy Ticino mountain village, well served by public transport, with a run-down infrastructure, but absolutely sufficient for the project. The title of the concept was *Zukunftsfabrik*. It was to be a place for developing and testing social visions. An attempt to see how a disused industrial site could bring new life to a valley. I liked the idea and wanted to find out to what extent it could be translated into reality.

The need to create a place for self-organized, creative encounters between disciplines did not come about by chance.

I ran the offspace Perla-Mode at Langstrasse in Zurich with my collective FRICTION between 2012 and 2014. The building was demolished at the beginning of 2015. It fell victim to the increasing gentrification of downtown Zurich, like so many other self-organized spaces. Non-profit spaces for creative exchange are increasingly being pushed to the city limits and the periphery. This sadly happens everywhere, but in Zurich this change is



particularly visible. The factory area of Cima Norma triggered something in me: this could become exactly the place we no longer have in Zurich and in other urban regions of Switzerland. A *Freiraum*.

I immediately set to work. I spoke with the owner of the site - a large part of the site was vacant at that time and I knew that the owner would be happy about an activation and partial renovation - and I asked him about the rental conditions. I talked to the people who had been involved in the Re-fugium project back in 2016 and asked them if they would be interested in working on a long-term project. I considered what experience and resources such a team might still need (different disciplines, experience with project management, experience with accounting ect.) and asked people among my closer and more distant network of colleagues and friends if they would like to listen to my ideas in a meeting.

In January 2019, I invited to a dinner at my place, served soup and told the 10 or so people present about my vision. This session was repeated several times. The constellation changed, but I always served soup. And this was apparently tasty.

Then things happened quickly. In the spring of 2019, the newly formed group (we reactivated the Re-fugium association as the structural basis for the new project) signed a first contract on a trial basis to rent the former workers' residence Pensionato with the owner of the site.

The project team of about nine people at that time started working. We worked together on the concept, defined fields of work in countless meetings, formulated our ideas and a possible program, prepared budgets and wrote the first applications to foundations. 2019 was supposed to be a test year. We first wanted to know if there was any demand at all. There was! Without advertising the project, we received more and more requests every month.

Thanks to the low rent (the owner of the area was very fond of my idea of revitalizing the factory and agreed to meet us with an unbeatably low rent), we got away with the rental income from guests in the first year. Of course, this was only because we did not pay ourselves anything as a team. The work in the association board is voluntary until today.

However, we were able to create a 20% job in 2021 and are currently expanding it into an administrative office. From March 2023, Cima Città will pay a total of a 50% salary, divided into management and housekeeping.

In countless short and longer stays on site (in changing constellations) we started to transform the former workers' residence Pensionato into a cozy home for our residents. We emptied and cleaned the house, threw away furniture, bought new furniture at second hand stores and on Ricardo, made countless transports, started to take care of the old vegetable garden, painted walls, renovated the kitchen, furnished the house, picked up beds and sheets from relatives and friends, set up studios, laid a dance floor, built walls, cut down trees, acquired a car for transportation, built a fire place in the garden, sewed curtains, replaced bricks, carpentered furniture, built garden hacks and started planting veggies and herbs. We held countless meetings.

The areas of work became increasingly clear and we formed working groups.

We founded an association, gave the project its name Cima Città, launched a website, hired a graphics agency, got to familiarize ourselves with the neighbors – and welcomed the first guests.

The running order of what has been described here may not be quite accurate. A lot happened in the first two years of the project. Among other things, a pandemic.

When the project had just started to become known and we started receiving funding from foundations, the core of our project, being together, was suddenly no longer possible.

We had to close the residence for a few months, and after that we could only receive isolated groups at the Cima Città, we had to insist on tests and respect hygiene rules. All this was exhausting. However, the time we gained in this way also helped the project. As a team, we had more time for structural development, for fundraising, for the web site, for networking with other projects, for renovation work on site.

The project team has changed since the beginning. Some got tired of it all and left. They had children, took up other jobs, moved or didn't feel like it anymore. Others have joined. In particular, we started to look for team members from Ticino. We no longer wanted to be a project of German-speaking Swiss in Ticino.

Today the team is composed of members from different regions of the country. We communicate in English, German and Italian.

The association has over 60 members, the board, the actual project team, has seven members. In the various working groups (program, garden, infrastructure, communication, sustainability, hospitality, etc.), a total of about 20 people are actively involved in Cima Città the year round.

If I had known back then what I was getting myself into, I wouldn't have done it. Fortunately, I didn't suspect any of this when I wrote the first pages outlining this concept in the Atelier Master Transdisziplinarität in the fall of 2018.

While the project started as part of the Master's program and received further support as part of the Creative Alps LAB, it otherwise had few points of contact with the Master's curriculum. In the spring 2019 semester, the LAB took a field trip to the site. During the two days on site, the fellow students and the head of the LAB, Jens Badura, were very supportive with good inputs, critical questions and suggestions.

From that point on, I developed the project mostly outside of the Master's program.

## *My role in the project*

I am not an artist. And I am not a theorist. I can mobilize a lot of energy, initiate and implement projects. I'm good at motivating and convincing people. I'm good at creating spaces and opportunities.

Last semester, I was asked by my mentor Patrick Müller what exactly my role was within the project. That is a fair question. After all, it's not easy to understand from the outside how a project like this works and how the roles are divided.

The Cima Città board, the actual project team, functions hierarchically, and decisions are made democratically. The tasks within the team are carefully defined. This has to be the case, otherwise a voluntary structure of this kind would not survive for long. The working groups significantly complement the project team.

They are composed of active members of the association. At least one member of the board is represented in each working group.

So what is my role then?

Cima Città has become a steady and important part of my life. On average, I spend about half a working day a week on it. On a voluntary basis, just like the rest of the team.

My concrete tasks are: Co-presidency of the association ( leading meetings, strategic decisions, planning the general assembly), maintaining contact with other stakeholders on the site, networking in Ticino and with other residency projects throughout Switzerland, programming (writing an annual thematic call for supported residencies, putting together a jury, organizing workshops, organizing themed weekends and showings, etc.), maintaining contact with partner projects (universities, foundations), participation in the following working groups :

Fundraising, Communication, Infrastructure.

The organizational tasks take up the major part of my engagement for Cima Città.

*That is true for the remote part of my engagement.*

When I am on site, however, that is normally twice a month, I spend a lot of time with the residents. I have long conversations with them, get invited to showings and I give feedback. I spend a lot of time gardening. And with the furnishing and maintenance of the residency house.

Whenever I'm on site, I cook at least once for all the residents present. And I would do a fire in our fireplace at least once. I get rid of expired food or take empty bottles to the recycling collection. I wash lots of sheets and put all improperly stored kitchen utensils back in their original drawers. (I have a bit of an obsession with that). And of course I always meet up with some neighbors.

I love hosting.

I like to engage with different people, their projects and concerns.

I'm good at listening and connecting.

I'm quite good at giving feedback.

I love taking responsibility and making decisions.

And I'm good at organizing and delegating.

So that is basically what I do.



# Questionnaire





For a publication on artistic collaboration and co-creation at Cima Città, we would like to hear from you about your stay here. We are interested in your *stories and experiences*. But we are especially interested in *concrete instructions for action* (it should become a *hands-on manual*). These can be very concrete tips in keywords. Lists or tables. A collection of recipes for artistic collaboration so to say. Starting point is the specific place Cima Città. Meaning we are very interested in specific descriptions of the area, how you moved on the site, the trails through the mountains you took, the surrounding nature, a secret that only someone on site can experience, what inspired you or what you referred to in your work, etc..

The contributions do not have to be long. You can choose the language. You can also choose to send in *photos, drawings or sketches* that talk about your artistic collaboration at Cima Città.

If you want, you can write your name and the title of the project. Or you can remain anonymous. It would be helpful if you indicate the date of your stay and the number of people involved in the project.

The topic of artistic collaboration is complex and there are many aspects of it. We have listed here a collection of questions, divided into four areas. It is not meant that you answer all these questions. Rather, these are meant as inspiration.

#### *Frame*

- How do you establish a common mode of work?
- How do you share your visions and how does the idea of a common project emerge?
  - How do you formulate common goals?
  - How do you manage your time together?
  - How do you define areas of responsibility?

#### *Location*

- How do you proceed to discover and occupy the location?
  - Where do you work?
  - What inspires you about the place and how?
- Does your project imprint itself on the environment or rather the other way around?
  - What traces do you leave behind?

#### *Connection*

- How do you connect?
  - How do you build trust?
  - How do you deal with other people and groups on site?
  - How do you create concentration?
- What rituals help you to feel connected to each other or to the project?

#### *Communication*

- What methods do you have to communicate with each other?
  - How do you synchronize your needs and ideas?
  - How do you deal with criticism?
  - How do you reach decisions?
  - How do you deal with disappointments?



# ***Toolkit for artistic collaboration***

*Frame*



*(participant of F&F working week, June 2022,  
12 people)*

Every day someone else in the group can choose what to have for breakfast. We had: scrambled eggs, honey bread (with homemade Zopf), muesli, porridge, salad. Yes, salad.

The menu for dinner we have decided in advance, fortunately. We have less to think about now. There are cooking teams and other tasks that we have distributed among everyone. We do a *check-in every morning*. Everyone then talks about how they feel and what they bring to the day. We do very different activities. The days are very full, we can hardly get through the program. I would like to have more time.

Everything somehow takes longer here. I was afraid that we would get on each other's nerves after a few days because we are around each other all the time. But that's not the case at all. There's enough room here to get out of the way. And we are always busy and a lot happens in one day. It's fun to get to know the people in the class better. We deal with each other very differently here than when we're in Zurich.

## *Daily Check-in*

Gather in a circle. Preferably without a table, you can sit on the floor or on chairs. The check-in can take place outside, inside the house or in the studio.

It is important that you all feel comfortable. It is best to do it after breakfast, when everyone has had a cup of coffee and has something in their stomach.

Someone starts and then it goes in rotation.

Take your time.

If someone feels the need to speak at length, that's fine. If someone only wants to contribute something very short, that's fine too.

You tell how you feel in that moment. What is on your mind. For example, whether you slept well or not, whether you feel physically well.

Are you in pain?

Are you worried about a professional or family matter?

How do you feel about the status of the project?

How do you feel about the location today?

How do you feel in the group?

Do you miss anything?

Listen. No one should be interrupted while speaking.

There are usually no comments or follow-up questions from the group.

Offer support if a participant needs it.

Finally, thank each other for your time and trust.

And then you can move on to the practical planning of the day.





*(Luminanza, September 2022, 8 people)*

work with mind maps

big maps

write down everything that comes into your mind regarding the project (use post-its)

then start reorganizing the post-its on the map and then go cook some food or go for a hike

after that break (at least two hours) get back to your notes on the map

then start reorganizing

talk about how you feel with the map lying in front of you now

take some distance, go for a walk

repeat at least the same procedure the following day

common desires and common goals

defining (personal) boundaries

agreeing on scale and timeframe  
of the  
common project

assigning responsibilities  
assigning responsibilities  
assigning responsibilities  
assigning responsibilities  
assigning responsibilities

*Location*

arriving

*(Aga, August 2022, 2 people)*

We talk a lot about very intimate things here. We told each other about our childhoods.

Our families and the people we were and are in love with. We know each other for a long time. Since we studied together and have done different projects together.

A. has more experience with dance projects. She has worked a lot as a dancer for other choreographers internationally. I actually come from stage design originally. I sometimes perform as well. It's funny because sometimes I have the feeling that A. is actually at least as interested in spaces as I am.

We have our daily routines at Cima Città. We did not decide that at all, it happened. I get up early and do my stretching exercises. A. sleeps a little longer. Or that is what I assume.

We meet in the kitchen and make coffee, which we then drink in the garden. In the morning we don't talk much. Then we go to the "Giorgio".

We start with stretching exercises. We put on music. We move. We hardly speak at all.

Then we discuss the day. Often we draw together in the morning. We lie or sit on the floor and draw.

We listen to the birds and the other guests in the yard. The cows are very loud sometimes, probably when they get hungry.

We are most productive in the afternoon.

We don't talk much overall at work, I just realize that now. When we have a breakthrough, when we find a movement, we both feel it immediately.

We take breaks in the garden, drink tea, snack. In the evening, after dinner, we go for a walk as it gets dark. Then we do a lot of talking.



perceiving the place where you are

explore the surroundings

creating a space creating a space creating a  
space creating a space creating a space  
creating a space creating a space creating a  
space creating a space creating a space  
creating a space

*(Arbola collective, July 2022, 4 people)*

## Hamacarium Arbola

A good place to hang hammocks, to rest, meet, meditate, contemplate, sleep, read, etc... very close to the Pensionato building.

Just take the bag with the hammocks and take it there to a place with red ropes ready for them to be hung.

To get there take the stairs behind the kitchen door...

Once the stairs are finished, find the highest place of this mount, you will find a spot where there will be red ropes already installed in 4 different trees.

Each hammock and ropes are numbered to match. Hammock number 3 works on a knot, the others have hooks...

Make sure you don't step on the baby Maple Tree in the middle of the space... we all want to follow it growing...

occupying the space with your bodies

occupying the space with your visions

*Connection*







creating rituals

*(T., October 2022, 5 people)*

The river became the most important place for us at Cima Città. It is a magical place. We went to the river every day and we bathed every day. Or we dipped, I guess you have to say. You can't really swim, the water is not high enough. The stones form bigger and smaller pools, in which you can sit down nicely.

The other residents showed us the river on the day we arrived. It's a bit hidden. They all got naked to get into the river without commenting on it. We did the same. Oddly enough, it didn't feel strange. The water was freezing cold, despite the time of year. I guess the water comes directly from the glacier. Up on the mountain tops you could see some snow - in August.

It is noisy at the river. You don't notice it at first. Only when you move away from the river. Then you suddenly enjoy this silence. We spoke little at the river. Speaking is exhausting there. Each was for herself. In her body, on the stones. With the sun and the water. A green wall all around. Nobody else, no other people. No signs of any civilization. After the river we went back to the studio and continued working. Everything felt so light after the river. The river was actually like another member of the collective.

We spent more time there than in the studio.

learning from each other

care

*care*

କାରି

କାରି

କାରି

care

*care*

कार

कार

कार

*Communication*

listening

*(Marie, June 2022, 4 people)*

Read to each other out loud.

Poems. Books. Essays. Articles. Lyrics.

Whatever inspires you at the moment.

Don't interrupt.

Listen.

Go for a walk and listen to nature.

Agree to not talk to each other for at least half an hour twice a day.

Listen to music.

Dance together.



giving and receiving feedback

acknowledging  
acknowledging  
acknowledging  
acknowledging  
acknowledging  
acknowledging  
acknowledging

exercise patience

j

oint decision-making



**Conclusion**

*Why learn about artistic collaboration here*

Cima Città is not perfect.

Nothing is just there, residents have to arrange and organize themselves on the spot.

Cima Città requires improvisation.

Guests arrive and find a cozy space that they first have to occupy and animate themselves.

They have to communicate, in most cases, with other residents. For example, there are shared showers and toilets. These are not separated by gender. We, as an organization, also leave the room distribution and the division of the working spaces to the guests (as long as there is enough space).

There is only one kitchen and one dining room.

Both are spacious and offer room and infrastructure for up to 15 people. But how the kitchen is used, for example, whether to cook together or separately, is usually decided by the residents among themselves. What I observe is that most residents get into conversation with each other about the use of the shared kitchen. When cooking together or organizing regarding kitchen use, the ice breaks quickly and people start exchanging.

Cima Città gives room for ideas, for concepts, projects and experiments. Cima Città stands for encounter and deceleration. That's the feedback I get from all the residents. Sure, you can also meet in a studio or in a rehearsal room of a theater.

But it does something to you, to your relationships and ideas, when you leave your usual environment to work together on a project.

Residents take more time here. For everything.

And they pay more attention to detail. And they open up. That's exactly why this place is very well suited to act as a laboratory for artistic collaboration.

## *What I learned from Cima Città*

I had never managed a project of this size and duration before. And I have never worked on a project in another Swiss language region. I learned a lot about project management. About teams and group dynamics. About my own weaknesses and strengths. I had to learn that even if I am infected by the deceleration of Cima Città during stays on site, my time resources besides my job are still very limited and being responsible for that project has made my life more stressful. I learned that it is not easy to maintain such a complex project at a distance.

I have gotten to know countless different artists here. Met new people from different disciplines and language regions. I have seen very different ways of working, different approaches to topics. And I have also been able to engage differently here. Towards situations, people, questions. Everything is much more intimate when you get to know each other by the fireplace or at the river and not in the foyer of a theater or at a vernissage. The topics are different. The quality of the conversation is different. All these things have a lot to do with the place. With the specific setting. With the remoteness. With the surrounding nature.

Cima Città will not exist forever. This project will come to an end at some point.

As long as the project and the place exist, I still want to spend a lot of time there and continue learning. And I want to share what I learned with others.

*Not just somewhere: thoughts*



Krass. Abgefahren. Erinnert mich an The Shining, höre ich oft. Irgendwie spooky, heisst es auch immer wieder. Einverstanden. Ich selber habe Jahre gebraucht, um mich nachts alleine über das Gelände zu trauen. Je nach Stimmung vermeide ich es noch immer.

Ob es spukt? Und ob.

Geräusche, die nicht zuzuordnen sind. Seltsame Lichteffekte. Manchmal bleibt der Nebel in den Fabrikgebäuden hängen, als wolle er einen warnen. Wovor. Es raschelt überall. Nicht nur, wenn es windet, was es oft tut. Das Wetter schlägt schnell um hier oben. Wir kleben sozusagen an der Wetterfront. Warme und kalte Luft treffen hier an den Berggipfeln aufeinander. An einem einzigen Tag kann die Landschaft sechs verschiedene Jahreszeiten inszenieren.

Cima Città belegt (oder belebt) einen Teil des Areal einer stillgelegten Schokoladenfabrik. Den Hinterhof eigentlich, aber dazu später. Schokolade in den Alpen. Mehr Klischee geht nicht in der Schweiz. Bei einem Besuch vor Ort wird das Klischee erst einmal herausgefordert. Alles überrascht. Was soll dieses überdimensionierte Bauwerk hier? So verlassen, so ungepflegt, so offensichtlich nicht Denkmalgeschützt. Darf das überhaupt, hier in der Schweiz?

Wer ist überhaupt auf die bekloppte Idee gekommen, hier Schokolade herzustellen? Hier hinten, oben, in dem Tal. War das Projekt nur deshalb erfolgreich, weil die Fabrikbesitzer sich eine Eisenbahnlinie bis vor die Fabrik vom Bund, also mit Steuergeld, haben finanzieren lassen? Hauptabnehmer der hier hergestellten Schokolade waren Coop – und die Schweizer Armee. Die Nähe zum Hafen in Genua war dem Unternehmen zugutegekommen, erfahre ich bei meiner Recherche. Der Standortvorteil wurde besonders während den beiden Weltkriegen relevant. Hier wurden munter weiter Osterhasen produziert, während der Rest des Kontinents im Elend versank.

Ob das Unternehmen vom Krieg direkt profitiert hat? Keine Ahnung. Aber Hand aufs Herz. Wir sind hier in der Schweiz.

Es gilt als das am meisten alpin-gelegene Industriebauwerk dieser Grösse in der Schweiz, lese ich weiter. Das historische Bauwerk, die schiere Grösse, die Patina, die das Bauwerk heute ausmacht, sowie die Veranschaulichung des ehemaligen Produktionsvolumens hinterlassen einen bleibenden Eindruck bei mir. Und bei allen Besuchern. So etwas gibt es nicht. Kann es nicht geben, hier in der Schweiz. Und dann noch ungenutzt. Wo sind damals wohl die Kakaobohnen hergekommen? Wer hat sie gepflückt? Wer verpackt und verschifft?

Das Areal reizt mich und ekelt mich zugleich. Ich kriege es nicht mehr aus dem Kopf. Ich kann nicht nichts tun. Ich möchte mehr wissen. Spreche mit Leuten. Alles bleibt vage. Vieles scheint möglich. Wieso hat nicht früher jemand was gemacht? Weil es ein Wahnsinn ist. Was will man denn hier oben.

Noch mehr als die Bauwerke und die Geschichte der Schokoladenproduktion imponiert mir die umgebende Natur, die Berge und Flüsse, die Wälder. Oder nein. Es ist der Kontrast, der mich befremdet und herausfordert.

Alpen ohne Chalet, dafür mit verwesender Grossindustrie.

Hier hatte jemand einen Traum.

Grosse Visionen und einen Plan. Ein bisschen Kapital bestimmt auch, gute Verbindungen zu einflussreichen Personen und die richtige Geschlechtszugehörigkeit.

Zwei Brüder waren es, wie ich erfahre. Sie waren nach London (ja, richtig) ausgewandert, wurden dort mit der Schokoladenproduktion vertraut und wollten ihrem Tal etwas zurückgeben.

Das Tal war schon damals arm. Nur wer es zu etwas gebracht hat in der Ferne, traute sich zurückzukehren.

Zwei Angeber also.

Die dann gar nicht so schlecht gewirtschaftet haben. Zumindest für ein paar Jahrzehnte. Das Tal hat tatsächlich profitiert. Von der Grossindustrie im Bergdorf. Arbeit gab es genug, vor allem für Frauen.

Dann kam Neid auf oder andere Verwerfungen. Und man hat sich überschätzt, hat zu hoch gepokert mit dem Hauptabnehmer. Nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg ging es relativ schnell bergab mit der Produktion. 1968 wurde die Produktion eingestellt. Das Tal hat sich nie erholt.

Die Bewohnerinnen des Valle di Blenio leben mehrheitlich von der Landwirtschaft oder sind im Dienstleistungssektor tätig. Es gibt etliche kleine Handwerksbetriebe, eine auffallende Dichte an Apotheken und Denner Filialen. Viele pendeln. Oder siedeln irgendwann um, in die nächste Stadt. Es gibt einige Ferienhäuser. Aber wenig touristische Infrastruktur, verglichen mit den südlicheren Kantonen des Tessins. Das Tal ist ruhig, wenig belebt. Wenig pittoresk. Die Palmen gedeihen schlecht hier im Tessiner Norden. Ascona liegt weit weg, Lugano mindestens in einem anderen Land.

Trist trifft es besser. Die Fenster bleiben abends dunkel, in den wenigen Kneipen wird nach 10 Uhr morgens mehr Weisswein und Bier verkauft als Kaffee. Es gibt kein einziges gutes Restaurant im Tal. Gefühlt jedes zweite Haus steht zum Verkauf.

Hier wird Italienisch gesprochen, soviel wusste ich. Dachte ich. Der ausgeprägte bleniesische Dialekt klingt für mich eher wie Rumansch. Die geografische Nähe zum Graubünden ist hörbar. Salve, grüsst man sich hier. Und Bun di, heisst es morgens. Ich verstehe kein Wort. Anfangs. Es geht besser mit der Zeit.

Ich lerne noch mehr über das Tal. Wo es den besten Käse gibt, wo ich unser Auto parken darf und wo nicht, dass ich in der Dorfkneipe Getränke umsonst kriege, wenn ich ohne männliche Begleitung aufkreuze.

Ich lerne, dass der Förster der weiseste Mann des Tals ist, dass die Frauen hier wirklich gar nichts zu melden haben (mit Ausnahme von der Wirtin der Dorfkneipe), dass die Grösse der Pick-ups viel über die soziale Stellung der Besitzer verraten. Ich finde es nicht mehr verwunderlich, dass Traktoren vor der Dorfkneipe stehen, stundenlang, tagelang, während ihre Besitzer drinnen um die Wette trinken. Seither versuche ich, den torkelnden Traktoren auf der Gegenfahrbahn auszuweichen.

Interessiert sich irgend jemand im Tal für das, was wir hier tun in der Cima Città? Das werde ich immer wieder gefragt. Solange wir im Dorf einkaufen, ja. Solange wir Aufträge an den lokalen Schreiner vergeben, ja. Solange wir dem Schneepflug einen Parkplatz anbieten, ja. Ansonsten nein.

Wirklich  
gar  
nicht.

Wir haben immer wieder Anläufe gestartet, um mit den Bewohnerinnen des Tals zusammenzuarbeiten. Wir haben Briefe verschickt, Leute auf der Strasse angesprochen, zu Konzerten und Abendessen eingeladen. Es ist nicht so, dass ich kapituliert hätte. Aber ich akzeptiere heute, dass wir den Leuten aus den benachbarten Dörfern im Zweifelsfall eher auf den Geist gehen. Dass wir unseren Scheiss vielleicht lieber für uns machen sollten.