

# “ARTS MEET TECHNOLOGY”: STIMULATING PUBLIC DISCOURSE THROUGH A CROSS-OVER EXHIBITION

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Regional Test case Documentation

09 2021

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DT3.3.2



Reporting Period 4+5



PP3, CREARE  
In cooperation with PP2, SACCI



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## 0. Abstract

Industrial regions are used to link the notion of innovation with technology. This is, however, not the only form of innovation and focusing on technological innovation alone leaves aside a big potential for transformation. With the joint test case “Arts meet Technology: Stimulating public discourse through a cross-over exhibition” that we implemented together with our InduCCI project partner, the Regional Association Cultural and Creative Industry Saxony, we wanted to show the public what happens, when artistic approaches to innovation are invited and given space and presented the results to the public in an exhibition.

## 1. Introduction

In industrial regions, innovation is connoted to a large degree with technology, which is why mainly technological solutions are looked for and other forms of innovation are left aside. We believe that this cements the region’s path dependency when openness towards other possible paths is necessary at times of profound transformations. We wanted to show the public of an industrial town the potential of other forms of innovation. Bringing technology in contact with arts, opens an experimental space and brings unexpected and fruitful results. At the same time, the value of artistic approaches becomes visible. This is what we wanted to bring across to the public in order to raise awareness and contribute to the discussion about what innovation is, which forms it can take and what we gain from diverse approaches to it.

## 2. Objective

The aim of this test case was to intensify public discourse about the potential of a collaboration between arts and technology for transformation. We wanted to raise public awareness for technological and artistic approaches to innovation and for the value of spaces, where these different approaches can meet in order to allow something new to evolve.

The test case was meant as an impulse for more openness towards other forms of innovation, thus showing a possible way out of the path dependency of the region. To make this idea understandable to a wider public, we wanted to exhibit concrete results from the combination of technological approaches with artistic ones.

## 3. Applied approach

“Arts meet Technology: Stimulating public discourse through a cross-over exhibition” was a joint action of two InduCCI project partners: the Regional Association Cultural and Creative Industry Saxony (SACCI) and the Creative Region Linz & Upper Austria (CREARE). Our cooperation would not have happened without the frame of the InduCCI project. To not double work and costs, we sought an efficient division of work and decided to split it as follows: our partners from SACCI were to focus on the implementation of cross-over workshops for artistic and technological innovators in Saxony, while we should focus resources on the exhibition and the public discourse. Both of us, of course, supported the other one in implementing the joint action.

In March 2021, SACCI organized together with an external expert, the Klub Solitaer e.V., three cross-over workshops for postgraduates and students from art colleges or schools led by artists - *Offline Gallery* with Fraunhofer Institute for Electronic Nano Systems, *Lab of Senses* with the Fraunhofer Institute for Machine Tools and Forming Technology and *Faserland* with the Saxon Textile Research Institute. One workshop, *Offline Gallery* at ENAS, was held by Fabricio Lamoncha, who is based in Linz and was put in contact with

SACCI by us. For details about this part of the joint test case, please check the respective documentation of SACCI.

In Linz, there is already an established cross-over format like these workshops in Saxony called S+T+ARTS (Science, Technology & the Arts) program. Within the frame of this program, longtime workshops with artists, scientists, and technologies are implemented. Instead of organizing another workshop of this kind in Linz, we decided to bring some results of S+T+ARTS before the curtain and enable insights into these projects for people who are normally not involved and therefore do not get informed about the results.

The location for the exhibition should be well-known as an exhibition space, easy to reach by public transport and close to the city center of Linz. We contacted three exhibition designers in Linz with an invitation for proposals for the conceptualization, curation, and implementation of the exhibition "Arts meet Technology" including the management of the exhibition, space & logistics and documentation. The profile of requirements was:

- Very good networking in the art and technology scene in Linz and internationally
- Experience in the organization, implementation, and documentation of physical and hybrid exhibition formats
- Methodological competency for mediation
- Experience in curating and presenting project results
- Very good level of spoken and written English
- Experience in public relations, especially social media

To benefit from the cooperation with our Saxon project partner, we had regular online meetings, especially towards the opening of the exhibition to coordinate everything well, ensure information for all sides, give space for feedback, advice, and exchange.

## 4. Results

As soon as we knew what the outcomes of the workshops in Saxony were, we were able to invite concrete proposals for it (see above). Veronika Krenn from the [Ars Electronica Linz](#) (AE) sent the most convincing proposal. With her, we were able to exhibit the artefacts in a prestigious location with a longstanding history (40 years) as a platform for exchange on the topics of technology, arts, and society. Besides a self-explaining, hybrid exhibition in the Ars Electronica Lab, she offered to have info trainers guide visitors through the exhibition, who would encourage and support discussion about the artefacts as part of the mediation concept. This was of utter importance to meet the objective of this test case - stimulating public discourse.

We invited four S+T+ARTS projects to be exhibited for four weeks alongside with the artefacts that were developed in the workshops in Saxony. The exhibition in the Ars Electronica Linz (AE) was finally named "CCI Lab" and contained the following pieces: 3 artefacts of the workshop *Faserland* dealing with non-woven fabrics, 4 results of the *Laboratory of the Senses*, "Artistic Recipes & Scientific Protocols" from the *Offline Gallery*, and 4 artefacts from the S+T+ARTS program - APeel/Biomaterial Innovation, Marinero/Tailored by weather, Design by Decay/Decay by Design, and Growing Patterns/Living Pigments. All descriptions and promotion texts were written both in German and English.

Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, museums were still closed in spring 2021, so the opening took place online on 22 April in a well-established format of AE call Deep Space live and consisted of a talk with Tina Duarte (SACCI), Gisa Schosswohl (CREARE) and Robert Verch (Klub Solitaer) about the topic of the InduCCI project and this test case. A video of the workshops and a virtual walk through the exhibition was shown and commented on by the talk guests. This video had so far more than 580 views.

The exhibition was on display for four weeks until 23 May 2021 and could be visited physically. Each week, a newly published “Update: CCI Lab”-video accompanied the exhibition. In these videos, the workshop leaders talked about their works. According to the AE, 2.995 people have visited the museum in those four weeks. As the CCI Lab was integrated into the permanent exhibition space, we assume that these visitors walked through the Lab as well. The views of these update videos range so far from 130-280 views.

To raise more public awareness, we invited the City Councilor for CCI Doris Lang-Mayerhofer to a guided walk through the exhibition on 4 May 2021. She has a wide community following her on social media (more than 3300 followers on Instagram) and posted information about it there.

## 5. Goal Achievement and Lessons Learned

We believe that exhibiting such artefacts in an industrial region transmitted the idea that artists do not produce things that are just nice to look at, but that have value for industry and thus for the region, which arises from the artists’ critical eye and play with material. Such industrial-artistic artefacts might also be more accessible for the society of an industrial region and be less of a contrast to the identity of the region. If we follow the aim of intensifying discourse, this might be crucial: instead of “pushing” the public towards art, art moves a step closer to what the public is used to, which might keep the barrier for playing part in the discourse lower.

The placement of artefacts from different project stages side by side showed impressively that it does not need a long time to come up with innovative ideas, what can be developed in a one-week workshop and what happens to such ideas when they are pursued over half a year.

With the location of the exhibition, it is important to find a balance between the accessibility for the public, the infrastructure needed to display them and the thematic embedment. One major difficulty was, that we did not know beforehand what would be the outcomes of the workshops and, therefore, what we will exhibit. It is quite challenging to find a well-known exhibition space that attracts many visitors or a curator for the exhibition before the artefacts are available. In advance, you can hardly know, how much space, what material or infrastructure (screens, headphones, lights, etc.), how much explanation and physical accessibility will be needed. Questions like *Does the artefact need to be touched to understand it? Does it need sound? Is it enough to see it through a window? etc.* are, however, crucial for planning an exhibition. Initially, this time was calculated, but because of the Covid-19 restrictions the workshops and exhibition had to be postponed.

It is important to put a lot of thought into how the visitors can be involved and invited to interact - something we could have taken stronger into consideration also in our test case. This was, however, part of the conceptualization and curation of the exhibition that we outsourced. At the same time, it is difficult to measure the intensity of a discourse - the number of visitors alone does not seem to be the right measurement. Also, a clear cut between who is the public and who not, is not easy to undertake: one could ask, if the participants of the workshops, who approach innovation for the first time together with a technological institute and obviously begin to discuss about the potential they see in there do not also belong to the public? Going public with their thoughts about the process as they did in the documentation video of the workshops, as the three guests did in the virtual opening of the exhibition and the workshop leaders did in the “Update: CCI Lab” videos, is what contributes to the discourse. Showing the artefacts alone seems to be not enough. Therefore, we recommend leading the discourse that you want to intensify.

There is another aspect that we do not want to leave unmentioned: The ongoing debate about who generally can participate in discourse. The texts and videos produced for this exhibition were written in a certain register of language that by itself includes groups and excludes others from discourse. This is the case with every discourse - so the question is also, how wide the term public can be defined and if the aim of reaching all can be set.

## 6. Outlook, Sustainability and Transferability

Stimulating the discourse about different forms of innovation and the future for the society of an industrial region undergoing transformation is certainly something that needs to be worked on steadily and we see a need to contribute to this. We have not decided yet, with which measures we would like to pursue this.

We see no hindrance for other regions to organize such workshops and exhibitions. For a discourse, it is probably important to have already a critical mass that initiates it and keeps it alive. How the exhibition will look, depends on the artefacts and the groups in society that should be reached, so we want to encourage others to be creative in the exhibition design - the same artefacts can be presented in various ways and in very different locations.

## 7. Annexes

**Video documentation of “Arts meet Technology” workshops in Saxony by Fabian Thüroff**

<https://youtu.be/pQOvhzNKKF4>

**Pictures of the exhibition at Ars Electronica in Linz:**

- [by Robert Bauernhansl](#)
- [by Nina Hawrylow](#)
- [Visit with the City Counselor for CCI Doris Lang-Mayerhofer](#) by Verena Kroupa

**Virtual exhibition opening (in German)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ldOXhGwYzM&list=PLKrmQr-thTw4GoogpavKYAT1LHgA4u30j&index=4>

**Ars Electronica YouTube Channel with all update videos (some in German, some in English):**

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLKrmQr-thTw4GoogpavKYAT1LHgA4u30j>