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At least five ways to run a guest studio

GOODWILL ALONE is not enough

The guest studio at Loviisa is celebrating its tenth anniversary in its present form. The Loviisa Guest Studio Foundation, which was set up in 1994, operated until 1999. Since then, the studio's programme has formed part of the cultural activities of the town. As far as the writer is concerned, international artist exchanges started being developed in the 1980s. So this 'one-man show' has lasted for ten or twenty years, depending on your method of calculation. My work as both a practitioner of the arts and a freelance producer has been pretty hectic, and as I run my eye down the list of over 50 guest artists I can see that my work has not been wasted.

The programme has brought Loviisa embryonic artists and stars with international reputations – painters, designers, professors, poets, composers and so on. Variety has helped bring down the barriers between different art forms and, in fact, diversity has fitted the character of the pilot project rather well. A good deal of work has gone into expanding artist exchanges, while discourse and a positive image have been developed as extra bonuses.

There are a great many residence projects in Finland, both active and passive ones led by artists or civil servants, and it is difficult to decide which of these provides the best operating model. In some places there are 'residence automats' where artists come and go, but nobody quite knows when, where and why. In others, the selection work is handled by major international outfits so there is time to expand the organization's own activities. A third type calls for a high level of social activity from its guest artists. A fourth type awards a grant and hands over the studio keys, wishing the recipient good luck, happiness in their work and an independent approach. In Loviisa we started out on this basis.

Many years of experience have shown me that not all guest artists are able to work independently or generate the contacts they need. The self-confidence associated with the heroics of departure can crumble away in the solitude of the guest studio. On the other hand, artists can also go through such exacting creative phases that there is no time left for any social life. In the end, the choice has to be up to the artist.

Then there is still a fifth approach where a residence project is set up and the organizers wonder why they receive no applications for it. Resources are used up in running the project and, as working hours are only from 9.00 to 15.00, there is no time for giving the guest artists advice. This particular approach can give rise to delusions where the producers or the organization may become more important than the guest artists themselves. I can say from my own experience that every effort should be made to arrange a

of contacts' for each guest artist, who will be available outside office hours. People are, after all, fundamentally social animals.

The 'association model' contains a generous helping of idealism coupled with a certain amount of risk. If the funding fails, some of the costs of the residence scheme have to be met by the organizers. It has to be possible to cover the running costs of the activities all year round even though the decisions made by the funding organizations about the amount of support are not made until the spring. Voluntary work is not enough on its own to guarantee the quality of operations, so a risk has to be taken for at least three months of the year.

An operating model where the producer at the residence is himself an artist is probably one of the more promising approaches. Artists are prepared to put in substantive expertise for next to nothing with no fixed working hours. Why? This has been the predominant approach in Loviisa where reasonable resources have been coupled with a free hand. The resources available have covered the costs incurred from all activities except for salary costs. If we have to improve quality, it will call for a realistic amount of extra resources, as even artists cannot make a living just out of sheer enthusiasm for their work.

The guest artists at Loviisa have followed their own plans of work and given lectures and exhibitions. Most of them have returned home well satisfied, with a stack of new works and their pockets full of constructive criticism and other feedback. However, the most important things that the artists take home are inside their own heads. Impressions and memories from an exchange can live on in an artist's work for the rest of his career and even persist after his death from generation to generation in the collections of art museums, galleries and auction houses.

From 1995 to 2005, the activities of the Loviisa Guest Studio have received support from the Ministry of Education, the Arts Council of Finland, the Arts Council of Uusimaa, the Regional Council of Itä-Uusimaa, Svenska Kulturfonden and the town