

## **OPEN CALL: BLACK COUNTRY CREATIVE ADVANTAGE I public - art - regeneration**

Seminar: November 2009, West Bromwich, West Midlands

We are looking for enthusiastic and curious activists and researchers, architects, artists, designers, planners, to participate in a seminar in November 2009 to kick off the black country creative advantage. With this two-year initiative we aim to investigate through collective reflection and action how arts practices can relate to or impact upon regeneration practices to support a more democratic involvement of local people in culture, public planning and developments where they live.

The black country creative advantage is a partnership between the Centre for Art, Design, Research and Experimentation [CADRE] at the University of Wolverhampton, and the arts organisation Multistory, based in West Bromwich. The project is led by Monika Vykoukal, Curatorial Research Associate within CADRE and Chloe Brown, the Arts and Regeneration Manager at Multistory, and supported by a grant from Arts Council England.

### **THE PROJECT**

The Black Country is a post-industrial area of the West Midlands conurbation to the north and west of Birmingham. Many parts of the region, including the town of West Bromwich, where the project will take place, are in the midst of large scale regeneration efforts. Regeneration has also involved arts and cultural initiatives such as the building of The Public as well as the community-based work of Multistory. The black country creative advantage will create a space to pause and reflect on those regeneration processes and their consequences in relation to democracy, social inequalities and sustainability. While on a policy level the recent report 'Prosperity without Growth' by The Sustainable Development Commission signals an acknowledgment of the urgency of those issues, local initiatives such as time banking and community agriculture are in fact underway to build alternative structures for mutual sharing and support.

The black country creative advantage aims to reconsider socially-engaged artistic practice in relation to regeneration within this specific local, globally interconnected context. Through a seminar, conference, and artist projects, we will review policies in their relationship to practices, and interrogate who regeneration is for, which interests get to shape those processes, and how cultural institutions and individual artistic practices function within it. The initial seminar's findings will form the basis for the development of the conference, which will focus on the creative tension between community or public art practices and the development agenda and take place in Spring 2010. Together, the seminar and conference will inform a series of residencies [scope dependent on funding] based on the issues and methodologies identified. Lastly, participants will contribute to a publication that documents and analyses the project.

### **THE SEMINAR**

The aim of the seminar is to more precisely define the focus for the further direction of the project. It will take the form of a participatory, collaborative workshop. The seminar will take place in West Bromwich and will be preceded by a tour of The Public, the key example of culture-led regeneration in the locality, on the evening before the seminar followed by dinner. This will allow for some preliminary discussion of the local context as well as for participants to meet each other and the organisers. The seminar itself will last a full day and will conclude with an open social event in the evening. This will encompass refreshments and the screening of one or more films relevant to the topic of urban regeneration.

We aim to bring together a group of 15-20 participants with complementary backgrounds, including critical understanding, knowledge of and research into areas such as cultural policy, regeneration and urban planning, as well as in art practices engaged in social and political issues around regeneration both from the West Midlands and further afield. During the seminar participants will present their research and/or practice in the context of three thematic workshops. Applicants are asked to decide in which workshop they would like to present their work or can suggest a different workshop topic. The final outline of the seminar will be shaped by all contributors. A final session will bring together our findings to develop a plan of action. The themes are intended to allow us to develop a good understanding of the framework of our activities and to combine research, theoretical understandings and

experiences of practice, as well as more locally grounded knowledge. The workshops move from wider issues around regeneration to those more specific to artistic practice to then identify potentials for meaningful action. It is intended that in all topics short talks from a research and/or practice perspective [not exclusively artistic] lead to a collective discussion.

### **1. Regeneration, urban planning, democracy**

We will look at the regeneration context in relation to planning in practice and theory, as well as concepts of democracy and the public interest. In addition to wider considerations and examples, we hope to look at the specifics of the local situation, and to relate the wider regeneration context to concrete experiences of regeneration as well as relevant experiences in terms of arts practices.

### **2. The arts in regeneration and culture-led regeneration**

The second session will move to a more specific focus on culture and arts within regeneration. It aims to look into the relationship of regeneration and cultural policies and institutions and more specifically the notion of culture-led regeneration. Together with the first workshop, it will seek to identify how art projects sit within the regeneration and planning frameworks and how this relates to wider issues both in terms of the role, position and potentials of the projects, and in its significance for processes around regeneration.

### **3. Terms of engagement**

The third workshop will look at how art projects, that aim to engage in transformative action with regards to regeneration could be developed. We will discuss what transformative action could be, if and how it could be created in an arts project, and what its scope could be. The workshop will consider the nature of the art project's engagement in the processes of regeneration, the terms of participation in such practices for differently positioned individuals, collectives and institutions and the relationship of specific practices, events and works to the wider cultural and regeneration contexts. Lastly, we will also consider what 'success' would mean, who defines it and how.

### **4. What is to be done?**

This final session will give us time to bring the facts, issues, ideas and potentials identified in the course of the seminar together to discuss and plan how the next steps of the project can best be developed.

## **HOW TO APPLY**

We are looking for participants who are interested in gaining and sharing critical understandings of the politics of regeneration and in particular cultural and artistic initiatives in this context, and in developing practical interventions in a specific regeneration context in the Black Country area of the West Midlands. While participation will not constitute a commitment to take part in any further events, those who apply for the seminar are expected to seriously consider taking part in the conference and the further projects. The exact date of the seminar will be arranged with selected participants. We will cover travel and accommodation and provide a flat fee of £ 100 per participant.

To apply for this opportunity please complete and return the application form, along with your current c.v. and documentation of a maximum of three relevant projects, activities or writings by you. To download the application form visit: [www.longhouse.uk.com/blackcountrycreativeadvantage](http://www.longhouse.uk.com/blackcountrycreativeadvantage) Deadline for applications is Friday 2 October 2009, completed application forms and additional materials to be sent to [M.Vykoukal@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:M.Vykoukal@wlv.ac.uk). For further information or to talk about any aspect of this project or the application, contact Monika: [M.Vykoukal@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:M.Vykoukal@wlv.ac.uk), or 01902 51 85 07. We will contact all applicants by mid-October.

