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THECAMP UNDER THE WATCHFUL EYE OF A
TERRITORIAL SCIENCE RESEARCHER (2/3)
MAKERY

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The researcher Raphaël Besson investigates the creative residence of thecamp in Aix-en-Provence (France) since September 2017. In his second column, he explores the “Hive method”.

The Hive gathers an international team of twenty creative young people within the innovation campus thecamp. Selected after an initial call for proposal, they have six months to prototype relatively freely a project (service, artwork, object), in response to the important challenges our society is facing.



The premises of Hive (in the center Eric Viennot, co-manager). © Raphaël Besson

The Hivers' are given a sponsor, Stéphane Natkin, director of the ENJMIN (Ecole nationale du jeu et des médias interactifs numériques, a French school devoted to training, research and the various professions in the videogame and interactive digital media industries, editor's note), as well as mentors: Matali Crasset (designer), Clément Apap (cofounder of the website Sens Critique), Jean-Noël Portugal (CEO of Daesign agency), Emmanuelle Champaud (cofounder of Totem, a Marseille based electric cars rental service), and Bruno Samper (cofounder of Nedd, an interactive design agency). A team of five (Eric Viennot and Sylvia Andriantsimahavandy, Djef Regottaz, Tiphaine Pitoiset and Marc Alcaraz) also support the Hivers in designing and building their prototypes.

Prestigious ancestors

The Hive is based on the rich and ancient legacy of collaborative experiences between artists, manufacturers, entrepreneurs and scientists, since the Nancy School in France (at the beginning of last century) or the Bauhaus in Germany (in the 1920s), via Experiments in Art and Technology (New York, 1960s), and most recently, the MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) in Boston or still A10 Lab in London.

Yet the Hive stands out from these models in one respect: a very long term collaborative and immersive research, in a unique public-private ecosystem. And by exploring new artistic and technical fields, particularly sensitive about digital and generative arts, openness towards connected objects, robotics, augmented reality technologies and in the methods of design thinking, design fiction or futuring design.



The exploration by the discussion and the collaboration. © thecamp

Diversity

Within the Hive, digital artists meet graphic designers, makers, sound engineers, coders, directors, social entrepreneurs or innovation managers.



Pape Abdoulaye Seck, 30, from Senegalese cinema to the Hive in Aix-en-Provence. © thecamp

Pape Abdoulaye Seck, 30, Senegalese film maker, directed several movies including the fiction feature Sagar. Nanaoui Amoros Silva, 29, is a dual Spanish/Brazilian citizen. She works in a makerspace in Brazil, which overall aim is to support and disseminate maker culture to the children, women and to disabled persons. David Erhun, 24-year-old American, experiments for several years now Amsterdam, France and Rwanda's (Kigali) fablabs, to develop his electronic projects, and evaluate their impact in developing countries. Francesco Garbo, 28, is an Italian director and multimedia artist. Stéphane Garti, 21, is a French engineer and digital artist.



American Labtrotter David Erhun touched down in the Hive for six months. ©thecamp

This diversity of backgrounds, cultures and projects, contributes to the effectiveness of this team, and also is the basis of the Hive method; focus is also on openness and access to otherness, and unique associations. Numerous Hivers confirmed this objective. Pape Abdoulaye Seck acknowledges that “our project was made possible only through the meeting of a director, a developer, a special effects specialist and an illustrator, also artistic director of the project.”

Community

This purpose of diversity is complemented by targeted researches of relational proximity strategies between the Hivers. The “cold” closenesses (spatial, organizational and institutional) are unlikely to be sufficient to stimulate imagination, narratives and ideas between so many people from so many walks of life. According to Eric Viennot, co-manager, “the total immersion within thecamp, the events and the rituals established, are essential tools to make community.” In Nanaoui Amoros Silva’s opinion, the Hivers “have voluntarily associated themselves into teams according to their

affinities more than their own skills. Here, we definitely feel an undeniable desire to share and transmitt our knowledge and abilities.”

“Through collaborations, you get to learn a lot about things that you wouldn’t learn about if you stayed within your own particular discipline, reports Pape Abdoulaye Seck, film director. I am immersed in new economic and technical realities; there is no doubt this will influence the way I conceive my movies.”

For other Hivers, the practice of the community comes at a cost. “The immersion is important to get to know each other, work together, and trust...but for six months, it is a long time,” says Nanaoui Amoros Silva. Some participants stressed their difficulty in achieving a balance between leisure and income, and their feeling of a certain social isolation.



Here, at thecamp, the boundaries are definetely fuzzy... ©thecamp

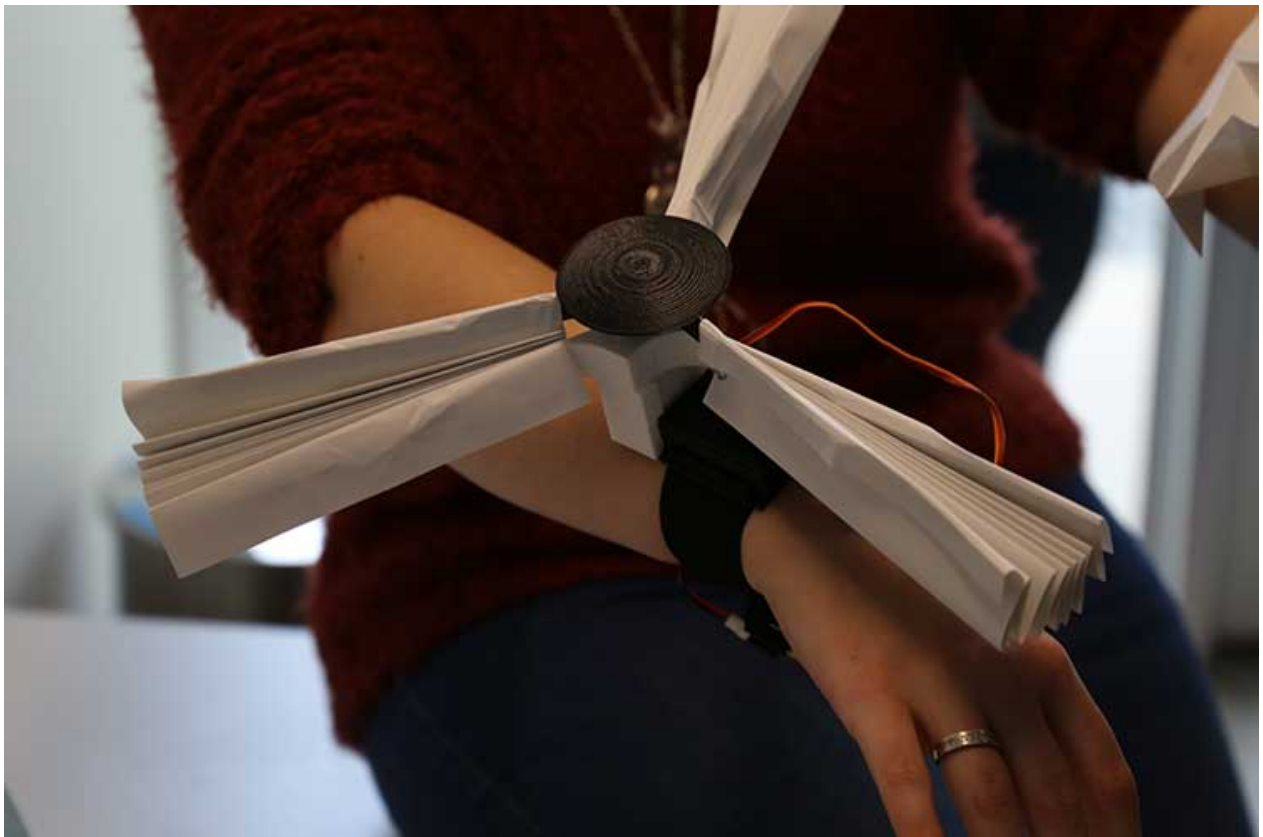
Nevertheless, the Hivers are not only limited to thecamp ecosystem. They develop their investigations and their partnerships on the local level (such as the Marsatac Festival, or with an

acoustician from Aix), but also larger in scale, nationally and internationally (an Italian perceptual psychologist, Australian researchers, Fabricademy...).

Initiatory journey

The Hive is not conceived “as a training, but as a path to creation and learning through the tools of collective intelligence,” states Djef Regottaz, program designer of the Hive, who is concerned about the principle of “learning by doing”. Since “to innovate, to change the world, we first have to transform ourselves, by experimenting, testing and by developing empathy,” he adds.

To design their project, the Hivers have been going through eight major sprints. Immediately after the immersion phase, to “slow down, get inspired, connect with the territory and meet its people, but also to cast a different light on their own education,” from September to November 2017, they experienced phases of definition and creative thinking, after which they presented their POC (proof of concept) in November and December.



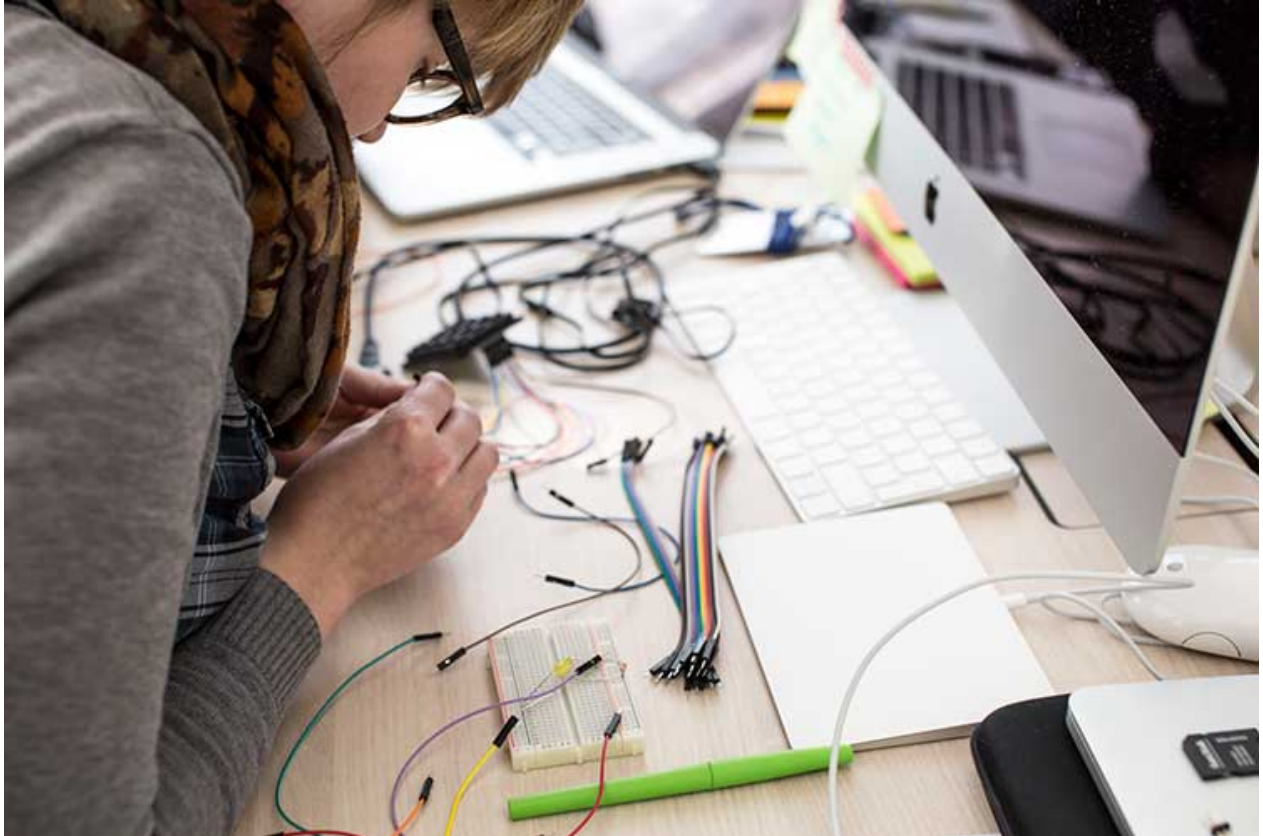
A prototype Wearkit developed by the Hivers Daniel Amaya and Stéphane Garti. © thecamp

They prototype and then test their project in a “test and learn” way, after what they develop their business model, prior to present their projects (“launchpad”), on March 22nd at thecamp and on March 27th in Paris, at the Maif Social Club. “Following this methodology, we try to develop the Hivers’ autonomy and capacity to invent,” says Djef Regottaz. This view seems to appeal the Hivers. “Here, you are trusted, you are given a chance to invent. It is very different from my engineering school where I was supposed to memorize and especially not to think out of the box!” adds Stéphane Garti. The Hive method should ensure a continuous regeneration of thecamp ecosystem. The Hivers are expected to “anticipate new practices and bring a disruptive look on the whole world,” since it’s where, according to Stéphane Natkin, “creativity grows out.” In this way, the Hive is expected to create porosity between the world of encoders, artists, and the more traditional one of creative industries.

That’s why the Hivers must closely interact with thecamp and its main programs, partners and clients (Sodexo, Thalès, Accor Hôtels...). They shall participate in the moments of ideation, prototyping or appropriation of innovative scenarios (utopian or dystopian). The Hivers remain rather tempered to these exchanges times and their ability to cast a critical eye. “We are having a hard time trying to interact with major groups, to get into their mindsets, says Nanaoui Amoros Silva. They consider innovation as an efficient way to create economic value. Our purpose is to get them to evolve into a more comprehensive approach of mutations. But it’s a challenging situation, sessions are short and we hardly feel legitimate.”

Deal with the teething problem

If the Hive approach undeniably encourages collaborative creations, it appears to be a need to strengthen the role and the place of the Hivers within the ecosystem thecamp, to fully benefit from their disruptive capabilities. And the very first Hive session attempted to avoid falling into the trap of a straight-line method. “We spent a lot of time on the steps of immersion and conception. We did and redid again and again the pitches, then we started experimenting, tweaking and started prototyping at a very late stage, at the end of December,” stated Florence Grosse.



Finally off to prototyping! © thecamp

Finally, the criteria for the selection of the projects undergo several contradictions between at least three imperatives of originality, scalability and feasibility; though not without generating some difficulties regarding their orientation. Yet Stéphane Natkin thinks that “the Hive is a lively method, based on the traditional try and error approach, as well as on prototyping. The team is currently working on improving the method for Hive#2, to be launched at the end of April 2018.” For the sponsor of Hive#1, “the quality and the creativity of the projects is what really matters, beyond the method itself.”