

## Arts and Culture in Education – Searching for New Land of Cooperation

Michael Wimmer/EDUCULT

In a historic review it becomes evident that the arts have always had a tremendous influence on societal life: be it Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance or Romanticism, all periods of history rely on artistic evolutions more than other societal achievements. Even in our times, “modernity” and its “post-modern” rejections connote its latest forms of artistic expression. From that perspective it is not implausible to say that finally the world can only be understood by the artifacts even we are not aware of in our everyday life.

Operators of good schools know that. All our ideas of a good school include provisions for encounters with the arts, whether music, fine arts, sculpture, literature, theatre or dance. There is no comprehensive personal development for young people without taking into account the arts – and of course also movement or sports. Good education policy is guided by the following principle: when the arts evidently hold a strong status in society, they must also be represented in the heart of the school curriculum.

In contrast to this implicit truth there are many schools in which the arts do not play a significant role at all; moreover, there is still quite a large number of citizens throughout Europe who would ignore the meaning of the arts and even state as a personal characteristic that they do not understand the arts and have no interest in changing that attitude. In this kind of personal stereotyping, dealing with the arts would be a fable of some privileged contemporaries in their leisure time, something that has nothing to do with the constraints of ordinary people managing their daily lives in increasingly insecure times.

Meanwhile aesthetic codes have found their way into the deepest corners of our lives and thus there is obviously a considerable discrepancy between the factual influence of the arts on all populations in society and, respectively, a lack of awareness in the greater part of Europe. This divergence can be viewed as the delayed result of an industrial regime relying on specific skills and abilities. Following its comprehensive enforcement, schools had to limit their provisions to a corpus of cognitive objective knowledge, whereas the arts as expressive forms of subjective emotions were assigned – if at all - to the privacy of the pupils’ homes and kept outside the doors of the school buildings. These ironclad concepts of what school is and must be, appear to have been nearly indestructible since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even while pedagogical movements for “progressive education” have tried for over a hundred years to expand the school curriculum to make the arts a core issue, the preservers of the national school systems found institutional strategies to successfully deny these challenges.

Much has already been said about the current comprehensive transformation processes in European societies. What we definitively can say is that the industrial era is going to come to an end. One of the consequences is an enlarged new cultural and artistic sector, particularly in cities managing their unique profiles and, ultimately, their attractiveness. Reliable data shows us that, meanwhile in this sector about 4 % of European labor forces in this sector find their professional forms of realization in this sector. This is more than, for example, the automobile or chemical industries. The other consequence is less gratifying when the national school systems have not yet found an appropriate response to these challenges. Their inability to take into account new circumstances diminishes

young people's abilities to tap their potential and, thus, find a place in productive and further developed European societies.

It is up to politicians like the former president of Germany Richard von Weizsäcker, who have learned their lessons when arguing that "arts and culture are not a luxury we can afford or even cancel, but the spiritual ground that secures our true inner survivability." Accordingly, this contribution will address possibilities and limitations of cooperation between the education and the cultural sectors in a new era in which we still do not have an appropriate artistically-affiliated term for it.

In doing so we do not have to start from scratch. In all European cities we dispose of long lasting traditions in dealing with arts and culture in education in order to improve the accessibility of culture to young and, until now, excluded people or foster their creativity. But in most cases it is still seen as a minority issue that only surfaces when the "really important things" are finished.

Those who lobby for making the arts an indispensable part of any kind of education can, meanwhile, rely on a number of international documents including the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989<sup>1</sup> which clearly states the right of each child to have access to a full range of forms of artistic expression and, thus, that schools have the duty to promote the development of "the arts and other cultural matters." Also the UNESCO Road Map for Arts Education 2006<sup>2</sup> together with the UNESCO Seoul Agenda 2010<sup>3</sup> can be seen as a clear invitation to make use of the arts as a "fundamental and sustainable component of a high quality renewal of education." After all, even the European Union with its highly economically driven character has included "cultural awareness and expression" as one of the key competences in its Council Recommendation for Lifelong Learning 2006.<sup>4</sup>

## National experiences

While these internationally agreed documents have often not found adequate ways of implementation on a national, regional or local level there is, nevertheless, a traditionally grown infrastructure for arts and cultural education whether in the formal school system or non-formal education settings. Evidence of this are informal collaborations like, among others, the ACE-Network.<sup>5</sup> In this setting national administrators in education as well as those from the cultural sector regularly exchange their experiences (often allowing the national representatives "of both sides" to become acquainted with each other for the first time). The ENO-Network<sup>6</sup> is another platform on which arts education researchers try to improve the evidence basis for any kind of arts and cultural education relevant to the decision-making processes.

## Arts and cultural education in school

If we look a bit closer at the type and extent of arts education provisions in the European national school systems we can easily find out that there are some, particularly with regard to music and

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://artsineducation.ie/wp-content/uploads/Childrens-Right-to-Culture.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/CLT/pdf/Arts\\_Edu\\_RoadMap\\_en.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/CLT/pdf/Arts_Edu_RoadMap_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/CLT/pdf/Seoul\\_Agenda\\_EN.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/CLT/pdf/Seoul_Agenda_EN.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)&rid=7](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)&rid=7)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.aceneteurope.net/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.eno-net.eu/>

visual arts; yet the majority of the arts stagnate on the margins of the curricula.<sup>7</sup> In comparison with the so-called “hard subjects” their status is low, and when it comes to certification they seem dispensable.

Additionally, there is a strong social impact when pupils from wealthy families attending arts-affiliated schools have more opportunities for contact with the arts than those with socially disadvantaged backgrounds in schools where the arts do not play a role at all. The negative consequences can be seen in the modest professional careers of the latter; but they are also echoed in the utilisation of arts institutions when their audiences, despite all cultural policy efforts over the last 50 years (“Culture for all”), still embody pervasive social inequality in society.

Following the current arts education discourse we can find at least two strategies for improving the status of the arts in schools. The more traditional one accepts the division of the academic world into different subjects but encourages an increase in the number of arts-related subjects. The result is a growing competition between different subjects: more music lessons, more fine arts lessons, even more drama lessons, regardless of what happens to the other subjects. As education policy in more European countries is less able to act as a referee in this game between different subject interests, “autonomisation” has been the easiest official answer. It should be left up to the schools which subjects are going to be prioritized and which can be diminished or skipped. It does not require tremendous imagination to predict that arts-related subjects are not big winners in this game.

The other strategy is a bit more fair as its representatives argue against a traditional curriculum separated strictly into subjects within the curriculum and suggest the alternative of more interdisciplinary approaches. In doing so the arts could lose their status as just an unpleasant appendage of valuable school material and instead find their place in cooperation with partners from other subject areas. Their representatives can learn from progressive education efforts which, for over a hundred years, has doubted that a strict division of the world into ten or twelve subjects is appropriate for adapting to the complexity of the world as it is today. The Finnish school system is in a pioneering position and has recently scrapped the scheme of isolated subjects and replaced it with interdisciplinary topics.<sup>8</sup>

In keeping with these intentions, in at least some parts of Germany so-called “Kulturschulen”<sup>9</sup> (schools with a cultural profile) have been put into practice. In fulfilling the claim of a “good school” the arts are not peripheral in one or another subject but, rather, exist as something interwoven with complex thematic approaches to be taught and learned. Accordingly, thematically-oriented projects rather than lessons are structuring everyday school life, overriding a strict time regime that seems to be increasingly less appropriate.

As such the arts are going to become a major force in actual school development. In this new type of school the arts demonstrate core differences between these subject approaches, representing a critical issue in contemporary schooling in terms of cooperation; internal cooperation within the schools making the teacher more of a team player, and external cooperation as schools are

---

<sup>7</sup> There had been a series of EU publications within the framework of the Eurydice program “Arts and Cultural Education at School in Europe,” last issue dated 2012. Online: <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4cc49f74-205e-4785-89e4-6490fb589d62/language-en/format-PDF>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/finland-schools-subjects-are-out-and-topics-are-in-as-country-reforms-its-education-system-10123911.html>

<sup>9</sup> [https://kultur.bildung.hessen.de/kulturelle\\_praxis/kulturschule\\_hessen/](https://kultur.bildung.hessen.de/kulturelle_praxis/kulturschule_hessen/)

developing as open learning centres makes use not only of internal resources but also the institutions and initiatives that the neighbourhood can deliver. Meanwhile there are many positive examples of cooperation between individual teachers and artists or between schools and arts institutions which allow the pupils to find new areas of experiences.

Many examples show that these new approaches to teaching and learning can be met with considerable resistance not only on the part of teachers (who have been carefully trained to become soloists in their areas of expertise) but also pupils and parents. “When do we get to learn again?” was only one of the questions a pupil raised after taking part in a cooperative arts project between a school and a theatre. This is just one indication that arts-based schooling can mean saying goodbye to cherished ideas of “learning” which long-lasting experiences is connected to constraints, exams and, all too often, boredom. These child-oriented examples show that the pupils in aesthetically rich learning environments find new chances to unfold potentials which would have been undiscovered in traditional schools. And suddenly a new kind of pupil appears that is not only prepared to incorporate previously unconsidered knowledge but to learn voluntarily and make use of their learned abilities in their daily lives: confidence and curiosity as the very basis for creative thinking and acting.

### **Arts and cultural education in non-formal and informal settings**

Besides the traditional and endangered provision of arts education within the formal school system there is also an infrastructure of non-formal arts related activities: public and private music schools, amateur choirs and ensembles, art schools, libraries, theatre or dance initiatives. In most European countries all these institutions and initiatives play quite an important role in maintaining cultural life and allowing access to arts and culture. What is often underestimated is that many of them have been established in opposition to the formal school system. Against the rigid school system with all its constraints (supposedly preventing creativity) representatives of the non-formal sectors tried to create a positive variant in voluntary handling of the arts and no permanent examination. Additionally, many of these non-formal institutions tried to address social inequality by focusing in a particular way on socially disadvantaged young people whose cultural background was not taken into consideration within the regular school system. That, apropos of the fact that the increasing number of migrants who have come to Europe in recent years have developed their own non-formal cultural infrastructure, one that is not reflected in education or even in cultural policy.

Within the current education policy debate the non-formal sector is currently being confronted with two major challenges. One lies in the creeping expansion of the formal sector; “full-day-schooling” starting with obligatory kindergarten as the all-encompassing answer to the growing social and ethnic diversification of European societies is limiting spare time for those looking to access the non-formal sector. The most plausible answer is, also in this case, cooperation between the institutions in the formal and the non-formal sector. For many schools this is still a hidden treasure as they are not aware that the non-formal sector equally disposes of a lot of education know-how that can lead to more attractive teaching and learning settings.

In contrast, schools can guarantee access to the non-formal sectors for young people who otherwise wouldn't take part in such programs. Everyday practice of cooperation in this respect shows that a number of obstacles must be overcome in order to organise that cooperation despite institutional barriers. Obviously, institutional constraints characterized by different language regulations, objectives, qualifications, procedures, quality standards or evaluation criteria make it necessary to

carefully prepare any kind of cooperative settings. In Austria, for example, so-called “Campus Schools” are improving opportunities for good cooperation with an architectural framework that brings the different institutions closely together allowing the pupils to jump from one learning setting to another without noticing the differences in the institutional character.

The other challenge lies in the incredible enlargement of the informal sectors in the recent past. The commercially driven cultural sector together with the omnipresence of social media has led to a far reaching transformation both in terms of access to arts and culture and to the social cohesion of learning societies in the near future. More and more young people turn down the offerings provided by the non-formal sector when they can act out cultural participation with the help of a laptop at home. In keeping with these trends, the only chance for the traditional non-formal sector lies in their ability to bring people together physically and provide them with the experience of meaningfulness in shared artistic practices.

### **Arts and cultural education in cultural institutions**

In most European countries a few large cultural institutions were built to function as the backbone of the national population’s cultural identity. As such they had no problem in attracting and keeping their audiences. When it was mainly the wealthy and well-educated societies that pursued access, no elaborate audience development strategies had to be conceptualized and implemented. This privileged position has been, at least, relativized during recent years. Even when the flow of tourists visiting the institutions is ensured, for most local people the programs, including those of internationally renowned cultural institutions, became rather irrelevant. As a stereotype reaction these institutions turned to schools to better prepare their pupils as “the audience of tomorrow,” not taking into account that, in the meantime, the majority of schools follow other priorities such as creativity or self-expression. As a consequence most cultural institutions, even small initiatives, have established their own education and mediation programs to better communicate with those who are not regular visitors. This is the more true when cultural policy makers are confronted – often incited by populist political rhetoric – with sobering data after which fewer and fewer people would receive sufficient benefits from cultural institutions equipped with public resources. And so the publicly funded cultural sector as a whole found itself under constraint to redefine its relevance in society and, thus, to redefine its relationship with local communities.

All experiences show that this new task leads to a profound process of institutional transformation. It is not just about mere marketing adjustment; it is about radical changes in all institutional areas such as management, programming, qualification, communication and cooperation. The respective challenges even grow when potential audiences are decreasingly homogenous and ethically, religiously, socially or generationally diverse, leading to a complete rethinking of what cultural institutions provide, not only from the perspective of a defender of the arts but also from that of a (potential) user.

When a new generation of qualified educators and mediators is in place, the need remains to cooperate internally and externally. For a long time, cultural institutions tended to follow an additive approach, believing that the sheer existence of an education department would be enough and the rest could carry on performing in the traditional art-centered way it. In the meantime, it has become more and more evident that intra-institutional cooperation between educators and mediators and all other departments would bring cultural institutions up to date. Only by following such an intersectional approach combining united forces could the organisation of new settings like

“outreach-programs” be manageable. The same is true in terms of external cooperation, when schools as well as a variety of other initiatives in civic society are seen as increasingly important partners that decide the success or decline of a project in an increasingly contested terrain. In most European countries a lot of public programs have been implemented, all of them pursuing the intention to foster the cooperation between schools and cultural institutions. They range from individual artist residencies to cultural institutions which run their own school.<sup>10</sup>

### **The importance of arts and cultural education in cities**

The success of efforts being made in schools, non-formal education institutions or in cultural institutions, respectively, relies on the dynamics of urban transformation. The sheer fact that the European cities of today look very different than they did only thirty years ago makes it clear that the comprehensive transformation processes of our time are also going to shake the ground in the areas of education, culture and the arts. While the world of the arts traditionally views itself as an avant-garde force trying to fight against inertia, education and culture are more likely on the side of the defendants of existing conditions.

Though in the cultural policy discourse over the last years the term “creativity” has experienced a lot of attention. I would like to add a slight warning not to overestimate hopes in that perspective. Yes, it is true that the acquisition of traditional skills are not any more a guarantee of finding a professional spot in the shrinking productive sector. So it is quite understandable, that “creativity,” as the new magic word of the post-industrial era promising to enable further economic and social prosperity, enjoys considerable popularity not only among political decision makers but among others as well.<sup>11</sup> In this euphoria it is too often forgotten that “creativity” also stands for a further strengthening of competition. In the shadow of this new battle ground more and more creatives in precarious circumstances<sup>12</sup> can be found, not to mention those who have less creative personal characteristics but other valuable talents such as restraint, resistance or empathy. In times of an insidious reduction of the welfare state they will – even equipped with the highest levels of education – lose their future perspectives.

This remark is meant to clarify that particularly in highly complex city structures a one-dimensional political strategy to foster “creativity” in education or in culture won’t lead to the necessary results. This contribution is mainly about an increased need for cooperation, internally or externally; personally or institutionally. This claim is also true in the political arena. As long as we can overlook the, up until now now, strictly divided institutional framework of an average European city, we won’t master the current upheavals. By no means can it be assumed that the comparably weak sectors of culture or even education will be able to compensate for the failures in other sectors.

First and foremost, it seems necessary to overcome existing barriers—be they psychological or physical—and make use of the resource “curiosity” in searching for blank new terrain. This would be the application of “creativity” in all fields of a city’s competence. As such it would bring to the fore

---

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.kammerphilharmonie.com/zukunft-gestalten/zukunftslabor/>

<sup>11</sup> See Richard Florida’s incantation of the new creative class.

<sup>12</sup> When, for example, the average annual income of an Austrian artist is around €5.000, it becomes clear that artists are not an attractive wealth-producing role model. Instead the cultural sector is a mirror for social inequality in which a growing number of subsisting artists stand opposite a small number of rich celebrities.

that , for example, today’s environmental policy can only be successful when its aesthetic implications are taken into account.<sup>13</sup>

### **The role of public authorities**

As we come to the end of this article regarding the changing environment in which public authorities are acting to try to steer access to arts and culture, cultural participation or arts and cultural education of their citizens, we must take into account that most of those representing them are trained within the guidelines of industrialism. Thus, it is more than understandable that this framework of thinking about and acting on issues like business settlements, requirements of the labour market and the acquisition of respective skills are still deeply embedded in the minds of the actors in charge as, finally, the one and only political priority. Accordingly, the dominant industrial point of view still provides the only scale that counts. In comparison with that, in exact data transferable criteria, the arts, culture and also arts education—as spheres that extend beyond the dominant principles of immediate usability—tend to become quite irrelevant.

In this context it is more surprising that a new generation of right-wing populists have put “culture” on the political agenda and, therefore, tapping the emotional reservoirs of angry citizens to divide urban populations not only ethnically, but also socially, between arts-affiliated liberal and cosmopolitan elites and ordinary people yearning for a homogenous cultural home. And so we must learn that, with the growing new wave of illiberal and authoritarian forces, “culture” is nothing good per se but dependent on respective political framing. As with other issues, be they technology or communication-related, possible counter effects unfold alongside the individual and social use we make of them.

The increasing degree of social imbalance is all the more dangerous as the original political promise that post-war-period education would lead to a better standing in society will be found to be false. Compared to the optimism of the early days, even the original concept of education as the most effective ladder for success has become ambivalent. Currently there are too many people around who no longer believe in the promise that education—with or without the arts—will provide a better life. For them, other factors like ethnicity or family origin have become increasingly more important.

This kind of distrust increasingly produces massive frustration within urban populations and brings me to the final assumption that only cross-sectoral approaches combining competences in the fields of culture or education with issues like housing, transport, technology, environment, ecology or social security will allow for the maintenance and further development of social cohesion and prosperity. When, for example, in Vienna more than 25% of the local population is excluded from political participation, no measure to improve access to the arts and culture would have any chance to significantly improve the working and living conditions of those who are structurally excluded.

A review of history shows the extraordinary importance of the arts as a pillar of open, empathic and thus cooperative societies. From such a perspective we are invited, again and again, to put this experience in contemporary settings of cultural participation and education. But a look backwards also shows that up until now the potential of the arts, either in education or in other social sectors, has not been adequately applied and—observing the actual political portents on the European walls—

---

<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile there are a number of promising concepts like “Artistic Citizenship” (see Elliott. David J. ,et. al.) (2016): *Artistic Citizenship – Artistry, Social Responsibility and Ethical Practices*. Oxford University Press.

the unbelievable becomes an option and collective decline is possible. It is up to us, who have taken on responsibility for competence in urban development, to choose which way we will go. We should be brave as we enter this new land.

### **Photos:**

Aktionstag Sonnwendviertel: Community Art Project in an urban environment, which brought together young citizens and artists with the aim of bringing together "old" and "young" parts of the local population: <http://educult.at/en/veranstaltungen/aktionstag-livingsounds-livingmoves-sonnwendviertel/>

Living Sounds: Community Art Project with the Artist Peter Spindler, who makes use of masks in the public space to call attention to diversity issues.

Textilmobil: Artists Initiative at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna to cooperate with schools in creative design: <http://www.uni-ak.ac.at/textil/textilmobil.html>

Worksounds: EDUCULT Project involving students from vocational schools composing their own music: <http://educult.at/en/kulturmanagement/worksounds-wie-klngt-die-arbeitswelt-201718-2/>