

**Evaluating the Impact of Arts and Cultural Education: A European & International Symposium,
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Closing Session: Arts & Cultural Education as laboratory

**Contribution of Michael Wimmer/Educult Vienna
“Linking Culture and Education”**

Some general thoughts concerning the impact of arts and cultural education on the occasion of a survey to map out the existing co-operative structure of culture, education and youth in European cities

The place where the arts find its hated opposite

It was in the late 1990^{ies} when the Austrian artist Rainer Ganahl organised an exhibition with the title “The Educational Complex”. Following the intentions of Mike Kelley, who dedicated his artistic work to attacking existing concepts of culture and education, Ganahl tried to make the exhibition the place where the arts would find its hated opposite: education.

The good message that came out of Ganahl's work at that time was: There are artists around who find education an important issue. At the same time his artistic statements made clear that we do not deal with an easy relationship but with something comparable with a cramped love-hate-affair celebrated by an old couple mistrusting one another but obsessively related on each other.

These assumptions coincide with personal experiences revealing that under a nice carpet woven by a positive rhetoric about the importance of linking art and education in practical terms there are still all kinds of resistances based on mutual prejudices, preoccupations and other defensive attitudes.

Almost like a mantra...

Following our public discourse there are a lot of convincing arguments around to make arts and cultural education a top priority for educating young people. Almost like a mantra lobbyists allocate the importance of our issue by research revealing that arts and cultural education

- support the acquisition and the development of conceptual and practical skills,
- encourage making art, viewing art and visiting arts institutions,
- animate working collaboratively with peers and adults or
- increase engagement, motivation, self-esteem and confidence.

And a meanwhile an uncountable number of examples of good practices from all over Europe gives evidence that arts and cultural education can play a fundamental part in comprehensive personal development providing the necessary basis for viewing and understanding the world which accords with the times in which we live.

Nevertheless there still seems to be – not only in the minds of some worldly innocent artists - an equally big number of obstacles around that up to now successfully

prevent not only from arguing but also implementing the cognition of the importance of what we are talking about within the traditional cultural and educational infrastructure. To attach at least some of these obstacles mostly carefully hidden under the verbal carpet may not only produce enjoyment and confirmation but also doubts and irritation.

But you may interpret this effort as a kind of applied cultural education based on openness, curiosity and delight of discovery as a necessary prerequisite for opening the laboratory dedicated to the development of future perspectives.

EUROCULT 21 – Urban Cultural Profile Exchange Project in the 21st century

Let me start with the presentation of some of the results of research, my institution Educult carried out during the last years in the frame of the European city network “Eurocities”. It was mainly the cultural committee of this aggregation of quite a number of the bigger European cities which put a particular focus on cultural policy issues as a tool for “sustainable urban development”. One of the major results was “EUROCULT 21 – Urban Cultural Profile Exchange Project in the 21st century”¹ to analyse the impact of culture from policy-making mechanisms and strategic planning to the nature of cultural provision and methods of evaluation.

Under the title “Arts Education as a Means of Democratisation of Culture” the authors Gill Robinson and Birgit Freese not only found another version of convincing arguments to put arts and cultural education on the very forefront of urban development but also presented “in line with strategic plans and objectives reflecting the European Enlightenment rationale” cities efforts in arts and cultural education. They clearly show that cultural policy programs of quite a number of European cities under the headings of “arts education”, “access” and “audience development” are meanwhile focussing on children and young people as their main target groups. Nevertheless, the authors also had to admit, that there still appear to be serious problems concerning institutionalised co-operation between cultural institutions, artists, NGOs and schools (regardless of level) as primary educational institutions.

One of the main reasons of structural weaknesses was detected in the traditional organisation of the political competencies, since culture on one hand and education on the other are established in different departments. I can imagine that many of you can share these findings when trying to start a conversation on arts-specific issues with an official from the educational department. The normal reaction will be: “Sorry, but I am not responsible. For your request you should see the colleague from the cultural department”. But when you follow the advice and dare to use the term “education” on the cultural side you will end up with the inverse argument; “Sorry, but I am not responsible. For solving your problem you should see the colleague from the educational department”.

These kinds of experiences find its analogy not only on local and regional level, but also on national and even European level. It was during the European Conference on “Promoting Cultural Education in Europe” last June in Graz/Austria when the representative of the General Directorate of the European Commission “Education and Culture” characterized the working conditions within this administration as “living together apart”.

The recommendation of the authors of EURO CULT 21: “There is a great need to work in a more cross-functional manner in the field of arts and cultural education, to break through work and responsibility models and make synergies more effective”. In the EURO CULT 21 paper you can find some examples in selected European cities to overcome the traditional “isolationist attitude” but they can’t hide that the system is still far away from structural changes. This is the more regrettable as Anne Bamford² in her book the “Wow-Factor” and many others have made clear, that linking culture and education on all political, administrative and institutional level is one of the most important prerequisites for quality provision of arts and cultural education.

Linking Culture and Education

As a kind of follow up of EURO CULT 21 the city of Vienna, as one of the member cities of Eurocities assigned my professional home base Educult with some research to find out how the linking of culture and education takes place in cities like Amsterdam, Athens, Barcelona, Bergen, Berlin, Cologne, Hamburg, Manchester, Munich, Nottingham, Stockholm, Vienna or Vilnius. Therefore we spread out a questionnaire hoping to get an overview of the state of the art of structural partnership alongside an analysis of the political visions, policy objectives, practical measures, monitoring and evaluation³.

There was quite a high rate of responses, some of them answered by cultural, some by educational representatives, in two cases from both sides (with – as I have to add – considerably contradictory answers).

To start with the positive elements of the feedback: About 78% of the cities reported to have formulated a clear vision why and how culture, education and youth should be linked more closely together. This looks as if a predominant number of European cities would have already initiated structural changes.

But now the problems start: As most of the answers came from administrative levels the feedbacks did not have a critical eye on the levels the colleagues who answered were personally involved. Accordingly they did not mention any evidence for change on political and/or administrative level: Instead of that – following their recommendations - it is the institutions that should change: Hence 72% of the cities involved in the research answered to give political priority to closer co-operation between cultural, educational and youth institutions.

With this announcement the next problem comes up: While three quarters of the cities think cultural, educational and youth institutions should work together more closely only about half of them formulated concrete objectives how this co-operation between institutions should be organised.

Of course there are impressive examples of how to provide incentives for structural changes on a large scale like “Creative Partnership” in England, the French initiative on “Éducation Artistique et Culturelle” or the “Swedish Model”. They are not narrowed by the accomplishment of examples of good practice carried out by some enthusiasts. Instead of that they are following a comprehensive policy trying to realise strategically driven procedures to achieve pre-defined objectives which are accompanied by monitoring and evaluation.

Such more comprehensive approaches you also can find in some European cities like Hamburg, Copenhagen or Stockholm, which have implemented quite a remarkable institutional basis of art and cultural education for children and young people. But also in these cases up to a certain point organisational problems of responsibility occur which make co-operation between different administrations and departments difficult. This may be due to the fact that it is not the city as a political entity but its districts which actually run the cultural activities for the youngsters. And that means that the decision making process is dislocated on another political and administrative level.

Our research was of quite open and of preliminary character. Nevertheless it seems to be one of the major outcomes of the feedbacks that in most cases it is still almost impossible to give a clear picture on the material side of the game that is on stage.

Almost no answer included quantitative data giving evidence of the number of institutions involved, the number of staff members and their qualification or the amounts of public money spent on particular administrative levels specifically dedicated to art and cultural education. And so it is not astonishing when an elaborated description of the beneficiaries, at least the sheer number of people, who get in touch with respective programs and initiatives, remains in darkness. Not to speak of quantifiable scenarios in which way our professional field should be equipped and realised within the next three or five years.

The dilemma with examples of good practice

Instead of that we are too often fobbed off by examples of good practice here and examples of good practice there which suppose to be parts of a glittering puzzle but the entire image never occurs.

These dissatisfying results bring me to another research, more or less dealing with the same problem: It was already in 2003 when the European Commission assigned the French Pole Universitaire Européen de Lorraine to carry out a study to produce an inventory of best practices linking culture with education in the EU-member states, candidate countries and the EEA countries. The purpose of the study was quite ambitious “to paint an overall picture of both national and European actions that link formal, non-formal and informal education, vocational training and young people with culture in its various forms of expression” and to provide recommendations and proposals for further action.

As the pilot program “CONNECT” was terminated after 2000 for many activists this assignment was seen as a positive sign supporting expectations of closer links between culture, education and youth in the next program generation of the European Union. If it was the intention of the study not only to identify the main actors, networks and examples of good practice but also to enable comparable analysis, then the results – available since summer 2006 on the internet⁴ – are disappointing.

The authors of the study obviously had severe problems to find common ground. As the research was mainly based on lists of very heterogeneous activities, projects, initiatives, programs and program areas on the different national and on European levels without any claim for representativity we can draw almost everything out of this

collection. Reading the results of this research we are reminded, that a lot of things are going on (without any indication of possible different trends in different parts of Europe). What we still do not know is the duration, the coverage, the numbers of people involved, the quality of training of the staff members, the type of financing, the embedding in the respective national cultural, educational or youth policy framework or assessments on the sustainability of these 350 examples but also of all the others.

And so it comes as no surprise that the executive summary of the study provides us with five main recommendations which in their generality can be seen as another list of wishes to Santa Claus: Making schools more appealing, providing vocational training, providing know how transfer, linking culture and science and promoting artistic and cultural professions. I am sure the colleagues in charge within the general directorate “education and culture” will draw out of this guidance of action a clear message. And the message is, there is nothing concrete that has to be changed.

I could go on with a number of other efforts to show the importance of linking culture and education by presenting examples of good practice. But as there are so many of them around my suspicion grows that these collections mostly embedded in an idealistic narrative of self-affirmation are not produced as an incentive for the implementation of a change management but as part of a defensive strategy trying to do exactly the opposite, to avoid changes.

To acuminate my arguments for a more general debate I would like to formulate some theses which might be worth to be embraced in the discussion of future perspectives.

What about the professional framework?

It is one thing to measure the impact of arts & cultural education for the individual learner. But to learn more about the impact for our societies we are equally in need of a clearer picture of the environment of the sector in which arts & cultural education takes place. The inquiry of quantitative data concerning the professional framework is the only way to allow the implementation of policy decisions which are based on transparency and sustainability.

What we urgently need is not only examples of good practices but empirical details like numbers of institutions involved, numbers of staff members and their qualification, the amounts of public money spent on particular administrative levels specifically dedicated to art and cultural education. On the other hand we need an elaborated description of the beneficiaries and possible beneficiaries and their cultural, social, political, maybe also religious background as a prerequisite of implementing and measuring sustainable environmental effects.

What about the political, economic and social framework?

While the first thesis deals with the internal side of the sector, the second refers to the political, economic and social framework in which arts & cultural education takes place. We have heard during the conference a lot of measurable evidence concerning changes on micro level concerning personal attitudes of those learners having been involved in arts or cultural education activities. But – speaking from a

macro level – what are the effects on the economic and social framework and how to measure it?

To give you a practical example: There are a lot of arguments around pleading for more “creativity” as the main resource for reaching the Lisbon objectives to make Europe the strongest economic power in the world. But in which way a respective impact of arts and & cultural education can be measured?

But there is maybe also a negative causality: Many European states are confronted with severe cutbacks of the welfare state. In general this means disproportionate cutbacks for publicly driven activities in the field of culture and education. This also means disproportionate cutbacks for arts & cultural education activities. With the result, that meanwhile in parts of Europe the arts & cultural education infrastructure has completely broken down.

Inn this direction my questions would be: Is there a correlation between the actual condition of the welfare state and the impact of arts & cultural education provision? And if yes, how can we take that into account in our considerations? Or to ask the other way round: If it is true that the gap between different social groups – mainly between the rich and the poor - is currently growing: Does that mean that the provision of arts & cultural education has failed?

Do we really want to change?

My third thesis deals with a rethoric exaltation in our sector obviously trying to produce something like Villages of Potjomkin hiding that behind the scenery we do not dispose of a corresponding empirical equivalent. It seems as if there was an inverse proportionality between the lack of knowledge, not to say the ignorance concerning the empirical description of the professional framework in which arts and cultural education takes place and the arbitrarily high expectations expressed by lobbying strategies promising a mighty tool against global warming, population growth, social fragmentation, pollution, drug addiction or war and violence.

As there is no prove which could provide evidence that arts & cultural education is able to contribute in reducing global warming, arts & cultural education runs the risk to be seen as a kind of secularized belief; more than that, as a tool of counter-enlightenment misused to hide growing political and social contradictions more than to help solving the problems that are associated with these contractions. This suspicion becomes the more likely when at least my research showed a tremendous lack of information concerning all kind of data necessary for a transparent political decision making process.

Arts & cultural education as a complementary measure?

This brings me to my next thesis concerning the political dimension of what we are talking about. Following the rethoric exaltation of arts & cultural education saving the world without any proof of a concrete impact I have to read it as an expression of a certain reservation against democratic attainments of our modern societies. As a kind of meta-politics it makes us feel political (and therefore “on the right side”) without rubbing against the lowlands of everyday political life. Hopefully not only in my understanding there is social policy to solve social problems as its core business,

migration policy to solve migration policy, ecological policy to solve ecological problems and of course these politics are manifold interlinked. But it would be rather misleading if arts & cultural education policy would be identified as a kind of complementary measure to solve all the problems that other policies have failed to solve.

The unbowed need for political representation

But there is also another political aspect even more uncomfortable to be discussed. It has to do with the polity framework in which arts & cultural education takes place. The sheer fact that in the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, is it fascism, national socialism or is it communism, in all these systems of government cultural education played an important strategic role in educating young people “in the right way”. This is also the reason why at that time arts & cultural education institutes were much better equipped than many of them are today. But a high prize had to be paid by functioning as a means to impose and legitimate the then dominant ideology on the people.

If this is true we have to inevitably raise the question if there is something like arts & cultural education, as a good thing in itself. Or if we should differentiate in which context and for which purposes arts & cultural education is politically used to get a clearer picture of possible impacts.

Some of you will say, such a comparison is unfair. We are living in democratic societies and therefore political instrumentalisation does not play a role any longer.

I do not agree. Again I would like to give an example: Reading Fe Carol Duncan’s book “Civilizing Rituals”⁵ we are once more confronted with the uneasy assumption that one of the - if not explicit but implicit - roles of public cultural institutions is to represent the dominant political structures. To give reason to this argument she observed typical middle class children walking through museums and galleries to inherit a love for at least some of the exhibited objects. If it is the intention of cultural education to make the youngsters feel entitled than we have to take into account that those most able to respond to the cues of cultural institutions are also those whose identities (social, sexual, racial) it most fully confirms: “what we see and do not see in art museums – and on what terms and by whose authority – is closely linked to larger questions about who constitutes the community and who shall exercise the power to define its identity – For her then, the impact of institutions like art galleries is to reinforce the existing power structure”. Following Duncan we can understand, why some of the participants of arts & cultural education activities feel they belong to and others feel inferior.

When taking into account the political dimension of what we are talking about it might not be enough to differentiate between education through the arts (extrinsic effects) and education in the arts (intrinsic effects) and content ourselves by trying to reconcile educational with aesthetical approaches. To find a more comprehensive adjudgement of the impact of arts & cultural education it seems necessary to bring in at least one more dimension which comprises the political circumstances in which arts & cultural education takes place. The result will be the inclusion of civic education in arts & cultural education considerations as another prerequisite for the quality development of arts & cultural education in our democratic societies.

Just a little sidestep

As we are traditionally unexercised to take into account the political dimension of our efforts in a critical way the overcoming of this taboo might give us an answer why arts & cultural education up to now hardly find adequate considerations in elaborated cultural and educational policy strategies. The conclusion from cultivating this kind of blind spot is: If we do not think politically we won't be able to implement our intentions in the realities of our societies.

The sociological dimension

If you can agree in the political implications of our work you might also see the sociological one. Arts & cultural education for most of the time was a priority of the middle classes. As a minority of the population they were privileged enough with time, wealth and leisure to grapple with subjects of intellectual difficulty to define and keep up their cultural identity. Accordingly up to now you find a clear correspondence between belonging to the middle class (measured by the degree of education) and participation in arts and cultural education programs.⁶

It was only during a comparably short historic intermezzo when the proletariat became a more or less well defined social entity. Following the claim to represent a counter model of the dominant bourgeois culture its members were culturally educated "from cradle to grave" by its own cultural institutions. But meanwhile this kind of cultural antagonism has become quite obsolete. Instead of that today we are confronted with a manifold social composition of our societies disaggregating in different life styles with widely dispersed cultural connotations.

This could be seen as a positive development corresponding with a growing plurality of our modern democratic societies. But this new fragmentation – and this could be quite a challenge for arts & cultural education – not only leads to a new quality of cultural freedom. It equally leads to a growth of inequality up to something like a new pauperized underclass.

Obviously they are the losers of the actual phase of modernisation; losing not only their material security but also their cultural affiliations. Referring to Raymond William's definition of culture as a "signifying system" the question in our context is: Is arts & cultural education prepared for this kind of fragmentation? Are we able to provide different methodological but also textual approaches depending on different social groups. Or do we go on in providing a traditional middle class approach and by that consciously or unconsciously contributing in the current selection of winners and losers of the actual status of modernisation. Anyhow it is the latter who are going to disappear from the social arena when they lose their symbolic instruments to signify their living and working circumstances. This would be the prerequisite not only to make their situation understandable for themselves but also for the rest of our societies.

How to make use of the arts?

Coming to my last thesis demonstrating a possible difference between using aesthetic techniques in traditional learning settings and taking part in arts processes.

I say that because I sometimes got the impression that the arts & cultural education sector has forgotten to comprehend the arts as *the* medium of reference which represents a critical accompanist of societal development and by that a major attainment of European enlightenment.

In our context of measuring possible impacts of arts & cultural education, the particular attainment of the arts lies in the denial of mainstream thinking and feeling to solely appreciating what can be measured. When Rainer Ganahl organised his exhibition it was his offer to make use of the arts as the only format that withstands any formatting, also the educational one. And it was meant as an artistic provocation and by that a chance to rethink our traditional attitudes although it might cause some inconvenience.

But when characterizing the arts this way – and I hope many of you still do so – we have to deal with a fundamental contradiction between our expectations to receive foreseen results on one hand and our desires to be confronted with unforeseen surprises which can't be solved. The only solution is to stand it. Because that is what life is about and thus what arts & cultural education could be about.

This contradictory approach seems to be the only way to make use of the arts to recover future perspectives that know about the growing need to be useful in all aspects of our lives but nevertheless appreciate to go beyond where the learner becomes someone in his or her own right.

Instead of a conclusion

I would like to close with a poetic advice by a Dutch experimental designer Luk van der Hallen to draft the outlines of future perspectives which might sound quite old fashioned but might be a proper device when not only facts but good memories, hopes and desires are in need for appropriate wording:

You should be playing on an attic.

You will need some loneliness and room for fantasy and experiment. Your mother has to be a true collector of things that will inspire you.

Be a little bit autistic. Be sure to have an uncle that tells you all kind of fantastic stories. Associate and combine. Use humour.

Take your time and think about who you are.

Your favourite tool is the drawing pencil and playing clay.

Try to shake and disturb people in a gentle and clever way.

Grow.

Change.

With mind and body.

Merge with the creative and learn to collaborate and share ideas.

Show respect.

Always be prepared for change. Travel into the world to refill and to learn.

Life is too short for all of your ideas, so be happy.

¹ Eurocities (2005): *Integrated Report including Policy and Research Recommendations*
www.eurocult21.org

² Bamford, Anne (2006): *The Wow Factor – Global research compendium on the impact of the arts in education* Münster

³ Find the details of the research on: http://www.educult.at/en_activities_eurocities.php?navi=2_5_2

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/culture/eac/sources_info/studies/educult_en.html

⁵ Duncan, Carol (2004): *Civilizing Rituals – inside public arts museums* London and New York

⁶ Keuchel, Susanne/Wiesand, Andreas (2006): *Das 1. Jugend-KulturBarometer. Zwischen Eminem und Picasso* Bonn