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Recommendations for Arts Educators to promote Urban Arts Education

This policy paper addresses the key research results produced throughout the course of the URB_ART project, including guidance and recommendations for stakeholders, such as cultural or educational institutions, educators, artists and decision-makers, to promote Urban Arts Education. The term refers to a method of arts education that encompasses both the creative development of individuals and the understanding of regional and international arts and culture that takes place in large, densely populated urban areas with diverse populations. The paper outlines the challenges faced by practitioners working on making arts education in the urban setting more inclusive, followed by recommendations for consideration by decision-makers to reap the full potential of Urban Arts Education to facilitate social inclusion of marginalised communities.

Rationale

Every person has the right to freely participate in cultural life as outlined in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Therefore, the national states are obliged to provide the possibilities for all of their citizens to participate in cultural activities. Also, the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 acknowledges the integrative, participatory and empowering functions of culture and calls for education to promote a culture of peace and non-violence, an appreciation of cultural diversity, and culture's contribution to sustainable development.

According to the UNESCO Road Map for Arts Education from 2006 cultural education includes both the creative development of the individual and the understanding of regional and international art and culture. It is a central component of comprehensive personality development and creates essential conditions for active participation in the cultural life of a society. Cultural and arts education is a collective term for creative processes and learning activities in different disciplines. From an empirical perspective, it can contribute to social inclusion, participation and empowerment of individuals and social groups if it follows certain conditions. It has the potential to open creative spaces for learning and experience in which personal and community development is promoted, social access to cultural and educational activities is created and socio-economic barriers are overcome.

This policy brief contributes to upholding these rights and supports actors in their efforts to realize them.

Summary

Urban Arts Education has the **potential to empower, and inspire innovation and social cohesion**. Aligning urban arts[1], urban adult education[2] and arts education[3] can lay the path to social equity by addressing social challenges, improving social inclusion, development and equality. Urban Arts Education is an effective way to tackle social needs and challenges by fostering lifelong learning, empowering people with awareness, information, and skills, and promoting local engagement, contributing to bettering society and local growth and counteract marginalisation.

Factors for marginalisation are manifold and interlaced, varying contextually depending on the country. However, low income, followed by social exclusion, low education, weak linguistic competencies and ethnic background were identified as some of the primary causes. Research results revealed that marginalised members of society are often not aware of the opportunities to participate in arts or arts education offers. Reasons for this include financial obstacles, linguistic challenges, cultural differences and intimidation due to lack of familiarity with artistic expressions.

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[1] Urban art is understood as a broad term that encompasses all artistic manifestations that develop in public space and offer non-specialized people contact and collaboration with artistic and cultural practices. In short, any manifestation in public space with open access to all members of the community can be understood as urban arts.

[2] Urban adult education includes all forms of non-vocational adult education in urban areas, whether formal, non-formal or informal education activities by adults after leaving initial education and training. This concept refers on the one hand to the definition of adult learning of the "Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning" (European Union 2011) except formal vocational training. On the other hand, it refers to the concept of urban education in "(Re)Defining Urban Education" (Welsh/Swain 2020) except from school and vocational education and training.

[3] Cultural and arts education is a collective term for creative processes and learning activities in different disciplines.

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Approaching people where they are, i.e. in neighbourhoods, in open/public places, inviting them personally and in their native languages, would be a recommendation to meet this challenge of reaching out to target groups at risk of marginalisation.

In order to ensure inclusivity and avoid intimidation, Urban Arts Education offers and community art projects ought to be **designed with, and not for the communities**. Participants should be re-spected and seen as equal collaborators and not only "consumers". At the same time, a process-oriented approach is important: it is not the product at the end that counts, but being part of the process, and being able to express oneself freely is key.

A **transcultural approach** that understands that cultures are not homogeneous entities but increas-ingly hybridised, recognising collective and individual identities with different layers and giving space to multiple languages, either verbal or non-verbal, is essential.

One very important factor is to be able to offer arts education practices in urban areas to foster participation, empowerment and community development in marginalised communities related to **financing**. Arts educators and organisations working in the field are either working independently or as a separate department in large institutions, often working on a limited budget. Public funding that supports long-term projects, enabling a more permanent and safer environment and with broad categories to fit in, that is open to interlaced fields would be crucial to support the field of arts education.

In addition, in order to **strengthen the field**, providing infrastructure, and founding an association or network that offers mentoring, career development and assistance in funding opportunities would make a positive change. Alliances at the regional, national and international scales, would not only allow for an exchange of best practices and give a clear voice to Urban Arts Education but will also establish a strong relationship with the cultural policymakers and administration.

For supporting the sector of Urban Arts Education, it is crucial to **research its characteristics, po-tential, and potential weaknesses**. The question of isolation that arose during the pandemic needs more research focus addressing the issue of creating social spaces in the context of changing cul-tural interests. Besides, metrolingualism as a factor for exclusion, but also as a chance for inclusive methods via the arts is a research desideratum. Method-wise, it is recommended to use co-creative approaches and to also include participants of Urban Arts Education processes as a direct target group in the data collection.

Opportunities of Urban Arts Education

Urban Arts Education is an inclusive practice that has the potential to empower practitioners as well as participants from marginalized communities and inspire innovation and social cohesion. Data from the URB ART Baseline survey confirmed this; participants were predominantly confident their work contributes to local community building, emphasising the power of artistic expression to integrate excluded groups. Art can be a means to tell people's story, which consequently makes them visible and introduce them to other members of society, leading to an increased sense of be-longing for the marginalised. Various cultural differences and power inequalities become less domi-nant, creating room for all to participate in civic society and make themselves heard.

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Needs

Research results revealed that factors for marginalisation are manifold and interlinked, varying contextually depending on the country. However, low income, followed by social exclusion, low education, weak linguistic competencies, and discrimination due to ethnic background were identified as some of the primary causes. That being said, 70% of the respondents to a survey answered that their city has art opportunities for the deprived, but according to 83%, the issue of marginalised members of society being unaware of these opportunities remains. Reasons for this include a lack of internet connection, financial obstacles, linguistic challenges and cultural differences. These results indicate some art forms might intimidate low skilled adults due to lack of familiarity. Therefore, involvement in artistic programmes could make communities at risk of social exclusion feel more marginalised.

Another barrier is linguistic challenges. When people do not comprehend the dominant language, feelings of insecurity and fear of judgement can arise, creating barriers that are hard to overcome. This discourages the participation of low-skilled adults from marginalised communities in cultural and artistic events. To address these challenges, this paper contains recommendations with important points to consider when working in the field of Urban Arts Education with marginalised communities

Recommendations

Reaching out to target groups

In order to reach more marginalised people, it is recommended to make arts and arts education more accessible by bringing them to urban public spaces. Urban Arts Education thrives in neighbourhoods where people feel more invited. Furthermore, activities taking place outdoors or in open/public places attract interaction, intrigue passers-by, and have a democratic character.

"Key-workers" can play an important role in building a bridge to the target groups. Ideally, they belong to the specific group to be addressed and can therefore find the right way to approach people as an intermediary.

Arts education providers should reassess their invitations and advertisements, including the language, style, and media being used. People with fewer opportunities should be invited to these activities personally or with notices that would be understandable and appealing to them in their life situation.

Co-creation

Urban Arts Education projects in communities (e.g. community art projects) ought to be designed with, and not for the local community. In this way, artists and arts educators do not simply assume what the needs of their audience are but provide an opportunity for expression. Experienced arts educators and those working with marginalised communities reckon that for the learning process to be successful, participants have to be respected, seen as equals, and taken on as collaborators, and not only "consumers".

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Network support

Research conducted as part of the project pointed towards a need for networks. Respondents to the survey as well as stakeholders interviewed recognised the supportive role that networks can play, where opportunities for interest groups include communication, knowledge-sharing, psychological assistance, mentoring and career development, and dissemination of funding opportunities.

It's about the journey, not the destination

Our project's findings underline the importance of a process-oriented instead of a product-oriented approach. Here, what matters is the transformation, the permeability – not the result. There are examples of benefits that process-based learning brings to the learners – the outcome naturally comes after.

Transculturality is key

Transculturality is the understanding that cultures are not homogeneous entities that can be clearly separated from each other. They are increasingly networked and hybridised, especially as a result of globalisation and migration. This understanding can bring an empathetic perspective on the diversity of modern societies.

In order to understand and effectively work in social settings in diverse urban communities, an urban arts educator should be aware that cultural diversity and thus transculturality determine interpersonal relationships.

Recognizing collective and individual identities

Communities have collective and individual identities, that exist in a social context where inequalities emerge. To tackle these challenges, it is necessary to recognise these characteristics and eliminate the barriers that prevent access to cultural or artistic activities - structuring with an integral perspective of the marginalised, and being mindful of different layers and their identities.

The importance of language

Language is a barrier to entry to the arts sectors and in general, contributes to one's marginalisation. When people do not comprehend the dominant language, feelings of insecurity and fear of judgement can arise and turn into obstacles that are hard to overcome. And yet, once individuals do get involved in arts education projects or programmes, language ceases to act as a barrier. Also, art itself is a form of nonverbal communication. Dancing, painting, DJing, and other art forms are expressions that transcend language, helping to communicate even when verbal language is not understood.

Celebrating different languages by inviting participants to speak their mother tongues and creating art through its use can have a significant empowering impact. Multilingual approaches to education also include providing information and promotion in multiple languages, as well as hiring translators and multilingual educators to promote other languages used in the community.

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In addition to spoken or written language, consideration of which visuals and languages are used to invite engagement is a key aspect in ensuring the inclusion and engagement of previously marginalised groups.

Focusing on the assets will build a community from the bottom-up

Perspective changes everything. A positive outlook that puts the spotlight on the assets, rather than what's missing, will drastically change the outcome. The community art stories we voice proved: the glass is always half-full.

Safe space

Our research highlighted the importance of creating and holding a safe space for others. This concept refers to providing conditions for gatherings where people can feel comfortable, accepted and respected for who they are. In addition, support of cultural educators by social workers in the form of psychological assistance is an essential need for ensuring a supportive and safe environment.

Low-threshold action is the be-all and end-all

Keeping access easy and barriers low as possible is one of the main findings of our research. Free participatory offers, in community spaces, consciously invite people from different cultural backgrounds, genders and ages. Both in the initial communication in the promotion and in the implementation of the activities, the idea is a hierarchy-free space where all are welcome, being mindful of context, communication, and relationships of communities.

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About the project

The URB_ART project is co-founded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ adult educa-tion programme with the aim to support low-skilled adults in marginalised communities through the concepts and activities of Urban Arts Education; while building solid and sustainable awareness of the potential of Urban Arts Education. The URB_ART Project promotes social inclusion and inter and transcultural exchanges, with a strong emphasis on strengthening community building with hard-to-reach marginalised individuals and communities.

As part of the project, several Intellectual Outputs were produced after extensive research con-ducted by all partners; EDUCULT (Austria), ZRC SAZU (Slovenia), Proportional Message (Portugal), Reykjavík Ensemble (Iceland) and FilmWorks Trust (United Kingdom). These Outputs consisted of a Baseline Survey (IO1) that was conducted to formulate national and transnational success indica-tors and challenges in Urban Arts Education, a Compendium of Storytelling Resources (IO2) that listed success stories and good practices for transdisciplinary and multilingual Urban Arts Educa-tion. The In-Service Training Package on Urban Arts Education (IO3) provided opportunities for ur-ban artists and urban practitioners to learn how urban arts methodologies can be an added value for socio-educational community intervention, while the Toolkit of Video Case Studies on Commu-nity Urban Arts (IO4) showcased successful transnational practices on the involvement of marginal-ised communities in urban arts programmes and initiatives.

The project's last Intellectual Output consists of three Policy Papers that address the potential of transdisciplinary Urban Art Education, in terms of social inclusion. These Policy Papers present op-erational and policy recommendations that have been developed after analysing the results of this project, and are aimed at practitioners, decision- and policy-makers, and researchers in the cross-sectional field of adult education, arts and culture.

They consider metro- and multilingual approaches, and reflect on the participative approach and function of arts education in urban areas. In addition, they summarise how the results of the sur-vey, the project events, and the application-oriented outputs contribute to social inclusion and in-tercultural dialogue, and how they can support the creative and educational sector.

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