



URB ART

URB_ART Storybook: A Compendium of Storytelling Resources through Urban Arts Education



With the support of the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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Contents

The URB_ART storybook: how did it start?	6
The URB_ART storybook: how did we do it?.....	7
Austria: rock me, Amadeus!.....	8
Do you dance art?	9
At the end, there is always music.....	11
An oasis in the city	13
Just jamming	15
Austrian conclusions.....	17
Great Britain: creating change.....	18
Driving social change.....	19
Changing the narrative.....	21
Saved by music	23
Let's talk about mental health.....	25
British conclusions.....	27
Iceland: on the margin	28
Newcomers.....	29
Independent educators.....	31
Holding a space	33
Accessibility.....	35
Icelandic conclusions	37



Portugal: bridging realities.....	38
Empower through theatre.....	39
Picture stories.....	41
Dynamic duo.....	43
Urban sounds.....	44
Portuguese conclusions.....	45
Slovenia: Knitting communities.....	46
Breakdance and graffiti jams in the city centre.....	47
Knitting a nest.....	49
Women of all winds.....	51
Filmmaking behind bars.....	53
Slovenian conclusions.....	55
Essential conclusions.....	56
Storytelling resources in urban arts education.....	59



The URB_ART storybook: how did it start?

The URB_ART Storybook is one of the five main results of the project URB_ART - Supporting Community Development Through Urban Arts Education, developed in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme. From March 2021 to February 2023 five partners from Austria, Great Britain, Iceland, Portugal and Slovenia are collaborating, with the aim of supporting low-skilled adults in marginalised communities through the activities and concepts of Urban Arts Education.

All activities in the URB_ART project are subject to a strategic agenda of social inclusion and empowerment of low-skilled adults in marginalised communities, starting from a thorough research conducted in five partnering countries, through publishing this compendium, designing a training and a video tool-kit, policy writing, multiple national conferences, and a European symposium held in Vienna.

The first step in the project was to identify national and transnational needs, and challenges, related to marginalisation in the fields of culture and education as well as success indicators related to Urban Arts Education, whilst considering concepts of trans-disciplinarity, metro- and multilingualism. Through the Baseline Survey on transdisciplinary and multilingual Urban Arts Education, we invited practitioners of urban arts and Urban Arts Education to share their experiences, to describe their needs and challenges, and to identify problems they face in their work with marginalised people and deprived communities. We used questionnaires, interviews and focus groups to collect the data that was then assembled and presented in a [report published](#) in October 2021.

The URB_ART Storybook is the second step in our project, presenting the gathered knowledge to all those interested in learning about the current situation and trends of Urban Arts Education, social inclusion through art and the education methods inspired by trans-disciplinarity, metro- and multilingualism.

These are twenty stories from urban artists and practitioners of Urban Arts Education working across Europe, the accounts of their artistic journeys, challenges and successes in improving the life of low-skilled adults in marginalised communities through art.

The URB_ART storybook: how did we do it?

We created [The URB_ART Storybook](#) to bring closer the concept of Urban Arts Education as a tool for social inclusion and empowering low-skilled adults in marginalised communities. Our hope is that presenting the stories of urban artists and Urban Arts Education specialists will raise awareness of social exclusion posed by metrolinguality and the great potential of multilingualism and arts education to overcome many social challenges in urban areas.

Following [the concept of the Urban Arts](#), understood as any artistic manifestation developed in public space that doesn't require artistic or cultural professionalism from its potential collaborators and is open to all members of the community, we use [the term Urban Arts Education](#) as a method of artistic education, that embrace 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. Each of five partners contributing to this compendium started with a thorough research conducted in 2021 in [Austria](#) by EDUCULT – Institute of Cultural Policy and Cultural Management, [Portugal](#) by Proportional Message, [Great Britain](#) by FilmWorks Trust, [Slovenia](#) by ZRC SAZU Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and in [Iceland](#) by Reykjavík Ensemble.

Our international team contacted over 200 respondents to the questionnaire and conducted over twenty-five extensive individual and group interviews. Based on the data and collected information, the partners selected and presented four stories characteristic to their local context that can inspire and confront the readers with the reality of Urban Arts Education. Each contribution also includes a characterisation of the national background and recommendations for each country.

Following the stories from Austria, Great Britain, Iceland, Portugal and Slovenia, you will also find general conclusions and perspectives on common storytelling resources, success factors and recommendations for action in terms of Urban Arts Education for low-skilled adults in marginalised communities, at the end of this publication.

We dedicate this compendium to independent and associated adult and community educators, social workers, professionals in the artistic and cultural field who with passion and understanding reach out beyond the socio-cultural barriers to the marginalised: socially vulnerable individuals, groups and communities often living in deprived areas, the socially isolated or those excluded from artistic and cultural participation.



Austria: rock me, Amadeus!

The Viennese classical period—its representatives, like Mozart, or the impressive imperial architecture—is usually the first thing that comes to mind when one reflects on cultural achievements of Austria. Yet, Austrian cultural life goes far beyond this.

Over 1/5th of the Austrian population resides in Vienna. Due to its historical emphasis on the arts and culture, the capital city has a special meaning. Other cities like Salzburg, Linz or Innsbruck do not lag behind. In addition to classical music, operas, theatres and museums, Austrian urban life has an incredibly diverse offer, from both large cultural organisations and small independent arts associations, and a wide range of art education activities for people of all ages.

The main risk factors for marginalisation in arts and culture in Austria are low language skills, low income and low level of education. Surprisingly, not the lack of opportunities, but rather the lack of knowledge about opportunities reduces the access to Urban Arts Education.

When people do not speak the dominant language, a lack of information combined with feelings of insecurity and fear of judgement becomes a huge barrier to overcome.

Unfortunately, most small art organisations lack the funding and staffing to offer or even advertise their events in locally spoken languages, or to reach out to groups excluded for other reasons.

Arts have the potential to overcome communication barriers. Dance, music, and painting are forms of expression that transcend language. Creative and artistic expressions, gestures, facial expressions and body language are communication bridge builders. Therefore, low-threshold and target group-oriented communication is a key factor in strengthening social inclusion through Urban Arts Education. A translation of cultural content through artistic interpretation can thus be a strategic in educating and connecting different social groups.

“Rock Me, Amadeus” is a song by Austrian musician Falco, who offered an artistic reinterpretation of the world-famous composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. In Falco’s version, the 18th century music genius follows the punk scene in Vienna, he is a “virtuoso” and “rock idol”.

The alternative narrative creates a linkage between the traditional heritage and the contemporary urban life-style, and shows how culture can be interpreted in many ways. In the following, we would like to present four success stories from Austria on how urban cultural education and transdisciplinary artistic networking can succeed, taking linguistic aspects into account.

Do you dance art?



Have you ever visited a gallery or a museum to dance? Probably not. Places where visual art is presented are usually quiet, still, almost motionless, inviting us to linger and reflect.

There is another way. The linking of visual art and various forms of expression opens up new worlds of experience. This is the approach chosen by KOMM!—a transcultural collective of multilingual art and culture professionals and language educators for German as a second language—based in Vienna.

In workshops such as "Do you dance art?", communication happens not only with words, but "language through art": movement, gesture, dressing, etc. Experimenting with dance and language in response to Dadaist and Surrealist art creates spontaneous, witty and associative movements.

Participants learn about the exhibited pieces, receive an introduction to gender issues, and discuss the new insights together. Subsequently, they reinterpret the works through their

own formal language, use of pantomime and movements to the beat of a metronome. Several forms of communication merge together as the workshop participants learn, invent and use different forms of expression. The founders of KOMM! state:

“Art is a means of reflecting on life's experiences. That can be in many objects and things.”

Dance connects people and breaks down linguistic and social barriers. Shared interaction at different levels and interpretation of the exhibited artworks encourage and promote an exchange of experiences.

URB_ART spoke to Ramona Rieder and Mareike Heitman, founders and arts educators of KOMM! (www.komm.wien), a Vienna based association which holds workshops with German learners, mainly in museums, combining language and arts education. They also offer training for teachers and conceptual work, e.g. for institutions.

At the end, there is always music



For Hannah, a trainee DJ of the Firefly Club, the most important things in life are to enjoy life and to do what makes her happy, which is making music.

“It is like therapy to me: when I’m sad, music makes me happy, I sing the sadness away. (...) When I was nine years old, my mother passed away.

Music helped me to overcome my grief—it still does!”

People with cognitive and physical disabilities face a lot of exclusion and prejudices and are one of the most marginalised groups in society. This also applies to the music business and creative industry. Christoph Sackl and Sebastian Gruber decided to take action and in 2012 they founded the Firefly Club.

The non-profit association trains people with cognitive disabilities to become DJs and then acts as their agent for bookings. Their aim is to break down prejudices against disabilities in the creative industry. By supporting the exchange between people with and without disabilities, they want to contribute to a more inclusive world.

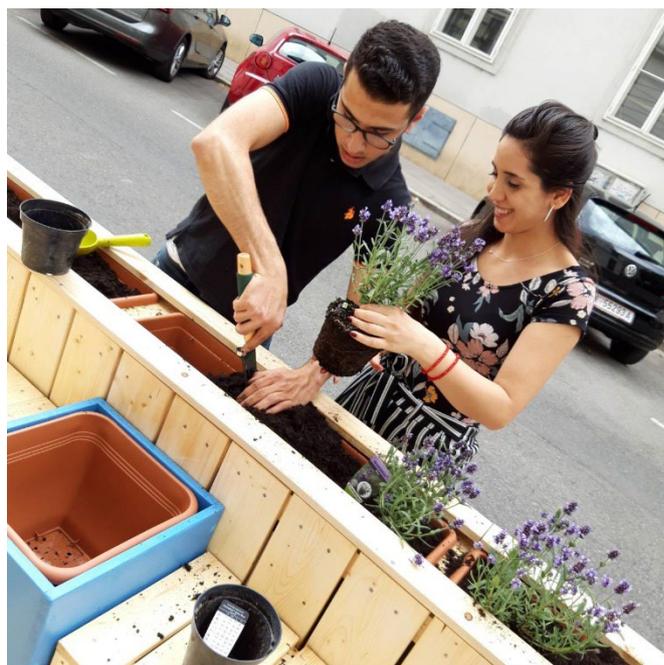
Firefly Club’s journey wasn’t and isn’t always easy. The main challenge has been finding funding for their project, often seen as “nice but not necessary”. Also, prospective clients for bookings frequently have prejudices and shy away from booking a DJ with a disability, or they hire them only for image and marketing reasons. Despite that, the DJs of the Firefly Club have already played at major clubs in Vienna, as well as a big Austrian music festival. For Sebastian, also a founder of the association, these were among the greatest experiences in his career.

A strong increase in self-esteem can be noticed among the participants, especially when they are on stage. For some, there is also a social aspect—they get out more. The project has a great effect on the audience: barriers fall, new contacts are made between people with and without disabilities. Some trainees also develop a lasting interest in music. Within the groups there is a close cohesion and a strong awareness of (different) disabilities. Language does not play a role as such—there are also a few almost non-verbal participants who communicate with gestures or sounds. Multilingualism manifests itself through other forms of communication. At their workshops and trainings, there is no performance pressure, as Christoph states:

“Different levels of difficulty are possible, everyone can go as far as they can—at the end, there is always music”.

URB_ART spoke to Christoph Sackl, co-founder and chairman of Firefly Club (www.fireflyclub.at). The non-profit association trains people with cognitive disabilities to become DJs and then acts as an agent for bookings.

An oasis in the city



Public city life is fast and anonymous, people pass each other in the streets and disappear immediately after the next corner or into a building. An open and barrier-free place for encounters and community building is often missing.

Architecture student and community manager Mais, who moved from Syria to Vienna, considers urban and neighbourly encounters to be essential for social inclusion and sustainability. As part of her work at Fremde werden Freunde (ie. “strangers become friends”)—an initiative for social inclusion—she has architecturally designed a parklet for transcultural exchange in Vienna's public space.

Together with volunteers and public cooperation partners, they have built an oasis for new encounters with sitting and gardening possibilities. It opened under the name Freunde Diwan because of its bookshelf, which contains books in many spoken languages in Vienna, including Arabic, English and German. *Diwan* comes from the Arabic language and describes a place of gathering, in this context a gathering of friends.

Supported and trained by a carpentry company, the cultural and educational character of the Diwan construction was in the foreground from the beginning. Mais said:

“Of course, it can be better if people already have these skills, but in my experience it’s nicer when people don’t, and just come because they are interested. Because it’s not about building a masterpiece, but just about creating a space where people meet, that brings people together”

In the meantime, Freunde Diwan is the summer location for the events of Fremde werden Freunde: storytelling cafés, language learning, readings, the book club or the chess salon, as well as an attempt to make the city of Vienna even greener and more attractive. Multilingualism and transcultural exchange have a particular importance. It is a place where ideas for civic engagement are discussed and implemented, or just a place to laugh and relax together.

URB_ART spoke to Mais Msto, an architecture student and community manager, who works at Fremde werden Freunde (www.fremdewerdenfreunde.at), an initiative for social inclusion. The organisation runs various projects including the building of a parklet, an intercultural university mentorship program and more.

Just jamming



How can groups from social hotspots who are difficult to reach, like drug addicts or refugees, be included in Urban Arts Education? Media designer and artist Peter Hutter and his collective Konverter offer sound mixing workshops in public spaces or in open arts education training spaces in Graz to reach out to diverse groups.

People battling addictions are often confronted with a feeling of pointlessness and emptiness in life, and state that they don't find joy in doing things they liked before when they were sober. According to Peter, there is a need to recast these activities, and to open up new areas of interest.

In his Synthesizer Workshop, both people with addictions and university students as well as musicians showed up and jammed together. In this way, people from societal groups from very different educational and social backgrounds, with different ways of communication and behaviour, came together.

In another setting, Peter takes a baby pram, converted to a sound mixing station to public places and interacts with the people with different backgrounds and languages, teaching them how to use the instrument and jamming with them. He says:

“Mixing music has functioned really well as a non-verbal mode of communication [...] Then you have shared emotions, and through this communication you notice right away—he’s responding to my audio output—it leads to communication and joy, and a certain intimacy. And they’ll learn something about audio synthesis for the first time [...] without really knowing it.”

Amid, a young man from Afghanistan, was attracted by this mobile sound station. Though they didn't have a common verbal language, he soon started together with Peter to create their own sound design and to react to each other's sounds.

“It felt like a form of conversation between two different ways of life. We laughed a lot together and felt very connected. I never met Amid again, but I had the feeling that this situation broke a barrier and had a positive impact on a person that is very much excluded from public life”.

Open access and making electronic musical instruments available can abduct individuals from their self-perception, break down social barriers and set social impulses; and that happens "only" through approaching each other and jamming together.

URB_ART spoke to the artist Peter Hutter, who, together with his collective Konverter (www.konverter.cc), runs sound-mixing workshops in various contexts, including in open spaces like parks and with people battling addiction.



Austrian conclusions

The four stories from Urban Arts Education in Austria were created in their own social and cultural context, but the approaches of the artists present some successful strategies.

Meeting at eye level, respect, understanding and above all **conscious integration and inclusion of different target groups** is a particularly important factor. This leads to empowerment, self-determination and the self-confidence of an individual or a group to be able to create something together and to be appreciated for it.

Another strategy that becomes clear in these stories is **non-verbal and multilingual communication**. It's a conscious attempt not to accept language barriers as obstacles to social exchange, but to work progressively against them. **Non-verbal communication combined with linguistic education** has proved to be a successful approach.

One of the supreme disciplines in inclusive cultural work is **bringing together different groups**. It can be mastered to a certain extent by integrating diverse groups through public relations, neighbourhood work and specific targeting. This can reduce reservations against discriminated groups and thus counteract marginalisation.

Low-threshold and barrier-free access to cultural projects are also shown to be crucial for the participation of many groups. If exclusion factors such as entrance fees, monolingualism or feelings of insecurity and judgement can be reduced or even disappear, an open atmosphere can be created to build communities.

However, many Austrian initiatives and associations working in the field of Urban Arts Education struggle financially. This is one of the biggest challenges. Mozart was a punk and rock idol of his time, even with his impressive contribution to Austrian and European culture, the music genius had enormous debts to banks. As controversial as it sounds, the Urban Arts Education projects maximise profit not for financial prosperity, but for our social and cultural prosperity, therefore they need **funding support**.

Great Britain: creating change

London is a global, cosmopolitan city with a high level of economic performance. One of the world's most expensive cities to live in, poverty is higher in London than in any other region or country in the UK, with many Londoners struggling to make ends meet. London is also the UK's most culturally diverse area. It holds over 35% of the UK's total foreign-born population—3 million out of London's 8 million population, with the majority from India, Pakistan, Poland and Romania.

Despite London's hundreds of museums and galleries, its thousands of theatre and music performances, film screenings, arts and cultural exhibitions and festivals each year, poverty and other obstacles in engaging with cultural events, such as language barriers or feeling out of place, reduce the number of marginalised communities that participate in arts and arts education.

Outside of arts provision in the UK schools, Urban Arts Education is an established alternative education offer. Most of these community art programmes are run by local charitable organisations and are artist-led. These activities are usually funded by philanthropic or NGO sources, with little direct funding from the UK government.

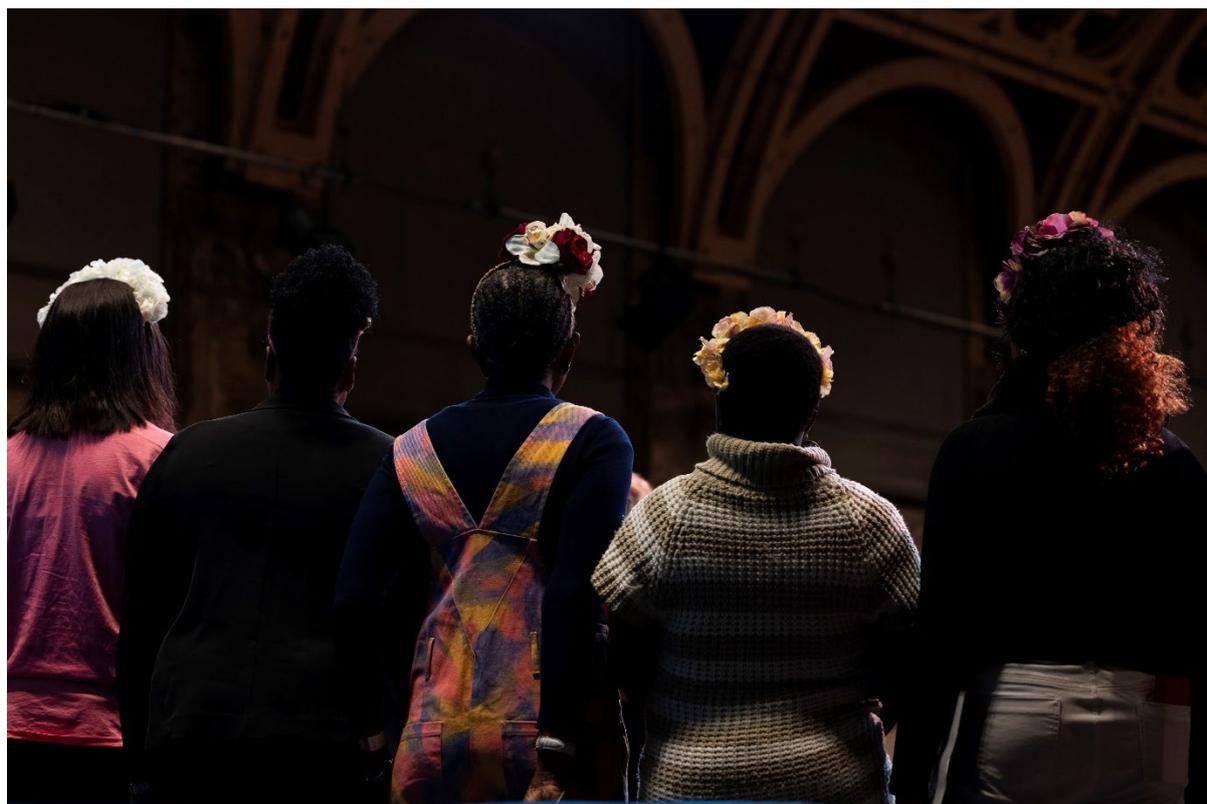
As charities, their impact and reach are limited and hampered by funding, especially those working with the most marginalised communities, who cannot contribute financially. As a result, the projects are normally limited in scope and time. Only a few providers seem to work across several cities, have a national impact, or offer beyond their own locale.

Moreover, engagement with the arts is disproportionately low among people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities—following the misconception that it is 'not for them'.

Despite these limitations, the results and behaviour changes achieved are impressive. The power of the arts to engage, deliver valuable skills and raise aspirations is well understood. It is seen daily by those running these programmes and discussed both at local and national level.

The following success stories from Urban Arts Education in Great Britain demonstrate how arts can tackle challenges and deliver a range of outcomes. From changing the narrative about a marginalised community to reducing social isolation, providing new skills and delivering social change.

Driving social change



"The Brexit referendum revealed deep splits in UK society. Close to the top of these came issues of migration, especially of refugees. The result seemed to give licence to a sector of society to insult and even attack refugee communities."

For many years Pan Intercultural Arts has worked with groups of young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, traumatised by the experiences of war, abuse, torture and the journeys undertaken to escape them. One symptom of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can be that imagination is reduced as the person seeks to deal with existential problems, which later causes difficulty to plan a life, trust people or express the desires for the future.

"The arts are a terrific way to re-claim creativity through drama games, vocal improvisations, role play and creating a safe space where people's ideas can be shared, developed and grown in a group."

Pan Intercultural's artist facilitators are from a diversity of backgrounds and trained in music, improvisation and physical theatre. They work happily with many languages in a group, through demonstration, playfulness and encouragement without the encumbrance of interpreters:

"We work only in English with plenty of demonstration, clear slow instructions, mime, physicality and copying. We allow other languages if there are peer-translators, and it is really needed, but avoid subgroups forming based on language. However, we encourage participants to improvise in their own language, tell stories, bring songs in their own language so that they can feel the freedom of the flow of their language."

A pilot project Building Bridges, run by Pan Intercultural, took place in a London college. The participants were split into two groups - migrants and individuals from the local area. They workshopped apart, then joined together to share ideas and discuss "otherness". The groups explored what makes up identity and how people react to other identities. They looked at hate speech and positivising speech and what it is like to live in a pluralistic society like London.

URB_ART spoke to John Martin, Artistic Director, and a founder member of Pan.

Pan Intercultural Arts (www.pan-arts.net) runs projects for refugees, unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, female survivors of trafficking and young people close to criminality.

Changing the narrative



When Lara Parmiani, as a young actress and theatre-maker, arrived in the UK from Italy, twenty years ago, she struggled to get lead roles on stage due to her Italian accent, despite speaking English fluently. While London had a cosmopolitan reputation globally, the West End Theatre did not reflect this. Accents on stage were not heard, and if they were, it was as a parody of foreign nationalities or one line from a bit part.

Lara did succeed in fringe theatre, and she found a commonality with other non-British artists, forming LegalAliens Theatre. A company of UK-based international artists that uses theatre as a means of discussing social issues, politics and for provoking change.

LegalAliens wants to change the narrative on migration and the 'refugee crisis'. Their stage plays use different nationalities, accents, languages to expose audiences to more diversity.

LegalAliens began running free theatre classes allowing migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers to learn English and acting, meet others that shared their background or similar challenges. Hosted in Tottenham—one of the most diverse but also deprived areas in the Borough of Haringey, North London—the classes were open to everyone, no matter their level of English or their experience. The sessions offer a safe space for people to meet, learn, and make friends while being creative.

"Many migrant communities stick together and cluster in an area, which means the opportunity to practice English is actually limited."

Simple theatre games, storytelling and improvisation encourage conversation in a fun manner. Vocal exercises (articulation, breathing, pronunciation) build confidence, and are popular with people who are shy and scared to speak. Participants are encouraged to invent stories, work on storytelling, free writing, and creativity. Traditional acting techniques (like Meisner's "repetitions" or Lecoq's "states of tension") are taught to develop speaking skills as well as confidence. The groups use extracts from contemporary and classic plays, to practice reading, build vocabulary and create characters.

URB_ART spoke to Lara Parmiani, artistic director and founder member of LegalAliens (www.legalalienstheatre.com), a women-led ensemble of international theatre-makers who have made the UK their home. They collaborate with artists from any background, irrespective of ethnicity, language, or nationality. Most of LegalAliens' work is in direct response to the need for migrant theatre-makers to feel seen and represented, and they use theatre as a tool to foster inclusion.

Saved by music



London contains some of the most deprived areas of the UK with low-income households and high child poverty, not to mention social problems like crime, drug and alcohol abuse. Young Urban Arts Foundation (YUAF) was created by Kerry O'Brien, who was saved from a challenging youth through her connection with music and the creative arts, in particular, Jungle and drum 'n' bass.

"Music saved my life growing up. Without becoming an MC or performer, who knows if I'd be alive today?"

After achieving success as 'Lady MC', Kerry wanted to give back to her local community and started YUAF to raise aspirations through music and to help others escape social deprivation. Since its inception in 2009, the foundation has engaged with over 20,000 young people.

One key outreach project is the YUAF Media Bus. Outfitted with a recording studio in the back, the bus goes into London's housing estates and is directly accessible by hard-to-reach young people and marginalised communities; working in urban areas where there are high levels of deprivation yet no services for young people to access.

YUAF's staff and youth facilitators have similar backgrounds to their beneficiaries. They use the bus to assist young people in exploring their aspirations, addressing the social barriers developing creative skills through music production, positive lyrical writing, spoken word poetry, vocal recording and singing.

"In our programs, we are not only keeping young people safe while they are having fun, but we are also creating a safe space for them to learn new skills, and to process their feelings and emotions."

Listening to feedback from young people, and as a result of the Black Lives Matter movement, YUAF co-created Black history workshops to take place alongside music production and lyric writing. It's an outlet for young people to express their emotions and lived experience of racism in a safe, supportive space, improving mental wellbeing and tools for resilience. A YUAF beneficiary said:

'I feel empowered from all the creativity flowing through the session'

URB_ART spoke to Jessica Ortiz, partnerships & fundraising manager of YUAF (www.yuaf.org). Young Urban Art Foundation's mission is to empower the lives of young people by strengthening wellbeing and building opportunities through creativity and culture, ensuring that they are seen, heard and celebrated.



Let's talk about mental health



"People with mental health issues are often seen as a set of symptoms. There's not much of a human connection between doctors and patients and people are also stigmatised in their own communities," says Sandra Griffiths, founder of Red Earth Collective.

The Red Earth Collective uses the arts to stimulate dialogue about mental health amongst marginalised and racialised communities in Birmingham. Working with a range of partners, practitioners and artists, the collective creates events and workshops that use theatre, music, film and discussion to raise awareness, challenge stereotypes and support better mental health and wellbeing. Together they created a platform to challenge mental health discrimination in marginalised communities, empower people in recognising signs of mental ill-health, and discussing their own wellbeing.

At the Bedlam Arts and Mental Health Festival, held in Birmingham in 2021, Red Earth Collective delivered an eight-week programme that mentored six Black adults with lived experience of poor mental health and different levels of experience in writing and performance, to create new spoken word performances that shared their experiences with

the festival audience.

"We explore the stigma that individuals from marginalised communities face when they attempt to speak about their emotions; giving a 'voice' and stage to those with poor mental health to break down misconceptions and prejudices and encouraging honest discussions about mental health."

Red Earth Collective also produced a scratch performance of "Rose Ward", a new play about the playwright's own experience in psychiatric care, which was directed by Cory Campbell, creative director at The Belgrade Theatre in Coventry, and supported by the REP and MAC Theatres in Birmingham who provided free rehearsal and performance space. As well as two public performances in the city, the team also put on a performance for service users, carers and staff at the Tamarind Centre, a medium-secure mental health service.

URB_ART spoke to Nick Schlittner, Development Director. The Red Earth Collective (www.redearthcollective.org.uk) are a Black-led, Birmingham based organisation that uses the arts to challenge mental health stigma and discrimination in racialised and marginalised communities.

British conclusions

There are many success stories within the Urban Arts Education scene in Great Britain, demonstrating its ability to engage marginalised communities and its value to the individual and the wider community; however, the **lack of a national provider** or **national representation** for Urban Arts in the UK, leads to the following problems:

Delivery is restricted to the local area. Most charitable organisations operate alone, on typically a city level. A **project-by-project funding scheme** restricts their ability to grow, reduces their financial sustainability and their impact. **Best practice is not being shared or duplicated**—without an overarching body or representation there isn't a drive to **exchange best practice** across the UK, and Urban Arts lacks a clear 'voice' in government or art circles.

Urban Arts are not taken seriously—research into cultural value has often focused on publicly funded activity in formal settings and mainstream art forms—so the available **funding is limited**. Art organisations depend upon several, different charitable sources, which restricts their ability to grow and retain expertise, as funding is typically less than is required and/or short-term or project focused.

We believe the following solutions would better support the UK's Urban Arts Education:

Creating a **representation body of the Urban Arts Education on the national level** would help to **build awareness across the country**, allow **sharing best practices, information and provide a 'voice'** to the many Urban Arts educators. Black- and Asian-led organisations are vital to ensuring that ethnic minorities are included in the Arts Education. The national team would work of **expansion of Urban Arts Education solutions across all UK cities** with the aim of reducing social problems.

Better funding for longer term projects—providing suppliers with security to enact long-term expansions and enable participants to continue to benefit and progress over the longer term and in greater depth.

There is a shortage of **diverse-led organisations** specifically devoted to arts. **Ethnically diverse people** are not well represented within the arts. **Targeted funding** could improve this situation and encourage more diversity and more organisations led by individuals with lived experience of marginalisation.

Iceland: on the margin

Iceland, a small and isolated country on the junction of two continental plates, is well-known for the volcanic activity and mighty geological phenomena embellished with incredible natural scenery. The “land of fire and ice” earned its recognition for the world’s cultural heritage with a rich literary tradition springing from Icelandic mediaeval poetry, Viking tales and a blend of historical and mythological writings: sagas.

Icelandic contemporary art scene is concentrated in the largest urban area, the capital region of Reykjavík city, where over 60% of the total population lives. The region offers a variety of cultural initiatives, performances, galleries, concerts and art shows, yet projects and events of high artistic value are also spread all over the country. Famous festivals, art residencies and studios operate successfully in small towns, villages and often remote places. In Iceland, a country with a population of only around 370.000, cultural initiatives are easily promoted and clearly noticeable. Arts education in Iceland is of high international standard, and it receives support from local and national governments.

Yet, the Covid-crisis has impacted Iceland’s culture sector more negatively than other industries. Those times of limited cultural activity and compulsory social isolation have not only prevented artists and art educators from performing their jobs, but also to a great extent increased the risk of social marginalisation. The crisis highlighted challenges of providing equal access to arts education and cultural activities for all members of our society.

Among the main reasons for social marginalisation in Iceland are low language skills, low income, social education, race and ethnicity, disability, age and rural background. While the lack of knowledge about the education opportunities, linguistic challenges, financial obstacles and cultural differences are the most common obstacles in access to arts education among adults.

In the last two decades, the number of immigrants surged, in 2021 exceeding 15% of the Icelandic population. This has necessitated a change with regard to social inclusion and providing equal access to information, education, social support, as well as culture and arts. Icelandic national and regional governments, followed by schools, organisations, and creative companies, have been creating policies and programs embracing the new multicultural and multilingual reality. Yet, cultural marginalisation in Iceland concerns also other aspects of social life, such as age, wealth and disability.

We asked art education specialists and practitioners in Iceland about their experience in working with marginalised adults and their perspective on the situation of Urban Arts Education.

Newcomers



Currently, every sixth resident of Iceland is a migrant, born and brought up in a foreign culture and language. For a newcomer who arrives to an isolated and small country at the very edge of the Arctic, it can take a couple of years before they adapt to the new circumstances, and even longer to learn the local language. Fluency in Icelandic, a basic element of the national identity of the Icelanders, is often regarded as a key to Icelandic society. When one is busy building a new life from scratch, making ends meet while working in a physically demanding and not always well paid job, art classes might seem like a luxury.

“Immigrants are marginalised and vulnerable because of their social and economic situation. They don’t have time to explore anything outside of working very hard to maintain a basic lifestyle. Because of this, they are left out of everything else,” says Michelle Bird, a visual artist and art teacher.

Michelle strongly believes that it’s much harder to reach out to immigrants with an art offer. That is why in her art studio in Borgarfjörður, a small town north of Reykjavík, Michelle hosts exploratory painting workshops for artists, adults and children of all backgrounds and languages. Michelle speaks English, Dutch, Icelandic, German and Italian and has

international experience in education. That helps her to connect instantly with minority groups and foreign-born individuals in her community.

In her teaching practice, Michelle focuses on evoking senses and creating a playful and effortless atmosphere. One of the exercises that Michelle incorporated in her workshops is blind painting with sound and movement. **“Create a space, a tactile, sensory environment that enables people to really connect in a very profound way with their artistic selves. Environment is everything. It’s not that I want to teach them an artistic method, but a method of connecting. What conditions are the best for art?”**

Michelle believes that the biggest support for Urban Arts Education in her area would be a community centre, a public space where artists could reach out to larger and more diverse groups. **“Not everyone feels comfortable visiting a private residency. An established community centre where everyone can gather, can bring their skills and talents and create together, would change the way we could continue.”**

URB_ART spoke to Michelle Bird (www.michellebird.com) an eclectic artist and liberating art experiences facilitator. For decades, she has taught creative team building workshops around the world to companies, middle schools, high schools and colleges, associations, clubs, and yoga retreats. From her art studio she hosts exploratory painting workshops for artists, adults and children.

Independent educators



Social marginalisation has damaging effects on mental health and leads to feelings of anxiety, sadness, frustration, loneliness and anger. Working against it can be one of the most satisfying jobs, yet teachers and instructors collaborating with minorities and socially vulnerable groups, witnessing their trauma and engaging with it personally are often left alone themselves.

“The most marginalised group in the arts are prisoners and former inmates, who have no access to art education at all. There is no cultural offer in the Icelandic prison system,” says Hrefna Lind Lárusdóttir, a Reykjavík based performance artist and art educator who, together with her collaborator Herra Fjord, brings art practises to prisons.

In 2020, Hrefna and Herra Fjord initiated weekly meetings for a group of male inmates at Litla-Hraun Prison in Eyrarbakki, with whom they’ve been exploring different art practises: performing, writing, voice work. Múrar Brotnir (Broken Barriers) is the first project of this profile in Iceland, introducing various art practices in prisons. Hrefna and Hera work independently. They not only initiated the collaboration with the detention centre and outlined the principles of the education program for inmates, but also organised the funds to make the project possible.

Independent artists, activists and enthusiasts are sometimes the first to recognise a social issue and act on it, long before an institution will engage with the problem. These are the pioneers, reaching out to the marginalised, playing a role of catalyst in social improvement.

They need to be supported. For example, when a teacher enters a prison, the isolated world of the inmates where stress is exacerbated by imprisonment, the number of challenges for the instructor extends beyond art education.

There are many ways to help. A comprehensive system of support for independent art teachers could have a form of a network or a trade union, offering psychological assistance, mentoring, and career and funding opportunities. The local communities, public administration and the government should recognise and acknowledge these agents of change: the independent teachers and instructors who, with the help of art, support the most vulnerable and oppressed members of our society.

URB_ART spoke to Hrefna Lind Lárusdóttir, a performance artist and maker, director and teacher, who investigates the boundaries of art forms. In her collaboration Murar Brotnir - Breaking barriers with artist Hera Fjord, prison at Litla Hraun and the Árnes Art Museum in 2020, she created an art studio for the inmates to explore different ways of artistic expression.

Holding a space



“There is no space for a traditional power relationship between the teacher and the students, when you work with the marginalised,” says Ewa Marcinek, creative writing teacher in community projects in Iceland. While leading a workshop for immigrant women who experienced domestic abuse, Ewa realised how essential it was to have a gentle and encouraging atmosphere of a democratic setting:

“The participants take the courage to face their emotions through writing and share their texts with the rest of the group. I, as an instructor, should take an equal risk in being vulnerable.”

Many of the artists point out that being an Urban Art Educator, it's not so much about taking up space, as it's about holding a space for others and exploring how the group leads itself.

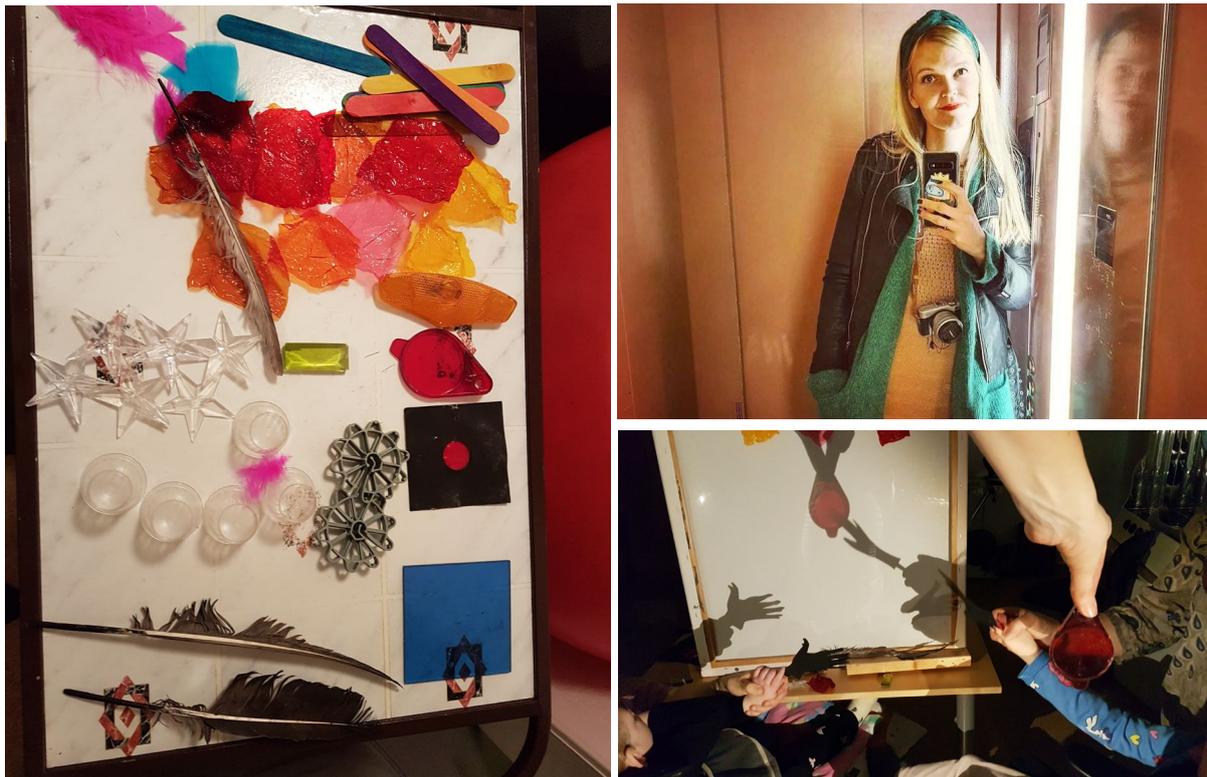
“Safe space” refers to places created for marginalised individuals to come together and share their experiences, gatherings where people can feel comfortable and accepted for who they are. Yet, one needs to remember that, in the words of Juan Camilo Roman Estrada, a Reykjavík-based performing artist and educator: **“Safe space, it’s not about protection, it’s about connection. How you create a connection is more important, in my perspective, than education because we need to begin with what we lack. We lack real connection with people.”**

To cultivate connection Juan recommends practising gratitude, grieving, silence, paying attention, active listening, good questioning, and storytelling. The foundation of Urban Arts Education and working with the marginalised is not to assume the participants’ needs or expectations:

“We need to tell stories in order to integrate our understanding about ourselves, but you can’t tell a story if there is no one to catch your story. My role as a pedagogic therapist is to create a space for a learning experience to happen, and I have to be ready enough, for if it happens I have to catch it in the air and make something out of it. This is art. This is the challenge. Because otherwise, we are just assuming things.”

URB_ART spoke to Reykjavík based artists and educators Ewa Marcinek and Juan Camilo Roman Estrada. Ewa (www.ewamarcinek.com) is a writer and project manager in diversity projects. She teaches creative writing in community oriented programs. Juan is an intercultural performance practitioner working in different forms of theatre, poetry and cinema. Juan is also an international trainer of Erasmus+ Programme working for Rannís - The Icelandic Centre for Research, and as a pedagogic therapist for Reykjavík City.

Accessibility



Margrét M. Norðdahl always knew she wanted to be an artist. Growing up in Reykjavík, a vibrant cultural centre with a multitude of galleries, only solidified her interest. Margrét studied fine arts and arts education at the Iceland University of the Arts and early in her career, she noticed how homogeneous the art scene was in the country:

“I’m vocal, I have the language, I have my network. I’m so privileged. A lot of people don’t have those opportunities. Yet, the whole system is built around people like me.”

During her work at Fjölmennt, an adult education centre for people with disabilities, Margrét realised that what we perceive as a typical class environment can also be challenging:

“For some people, the bad lighting can prevent them from hearing what you’re saying, because they are not able to concentrate.”

Accessibility is a learning curve for every teacher. When one of Margrét’s students, an adult with a high sensory sensitivity, couldn’t join the class, she realised how challenging for him was the spatial organisation of her art studio.

“We, artists, work primarily with senses, but when teaching, we sometimes forget how sensitive the senses of our students can be.”

Margrét approached her student on an individual level. After getting to know his needs and abilities, she asked a therapeutic specialist for a consultation. For this one student only, they designed a spatial orientation system, a unique map that, step by step, familiarised him with the topography of the art studio.

In order to be inclusive, we can reach out for help to all kinds of experts, because maybe we just need to change one little thing, and then we open up the whole course. Accessibility should be supported with funds, experts' counselling, and training programs:

“The progress in education is marked by inclusion of different marginalised groups: women, people of different ethnicities and finally, people with disabilities. Sometimes we have a perspective that the student has a problem, but the problem is in how the educational system, school establishments, and courses are designed. An inclusive art world is a decision we need to make.”

URB_ART spoke to Margrét M. Norðdahl, an Icelandic artist and art teacher, who teaches at Fjölmennit (www.fjolmennt.is) - an adult education centre for people with disabilities, at Iceland University of the Arts and The Reykjavík School of Visual Arts. She is a board member of Reykjavík Arts Festival; Art Without Borders (www.listin.is), and The Icelandic Folk and Outsider Art Museum (www.safnasafnid.is), that presents work of all kinds of artists, unrelated to their education or background—an equal platform within the fine arts.

Icelandic conclusions

In Iceland the arts are included in the schooling programs, but only those who have time, financial resources, and previous social experience continue arts education in adult life. Based on our research, we prepared a list of recommendations from Urban Arts Educators in Iceland:

Building a strong relationship with **the cultural policymakers and administration** is essential to inform them of the newest trends of social inclusion through art education, and to confront them with the needs and challenges of both the students and the teachers. **Social campaigns, political lobbying and collective action** against the rigidity and the exclusivity of the education system should include **introducing a subject of accessibility and social marginalisation prevention** in the obligatory program of teachers education.

Increased funding means creating better opportunities for the marginalised. Support should be targeted directly, to cover the cost of **concept development, hiring translators, child care, accessibility specialists and councillors**, as well as for continuation of projects in a **long-term scheme**. In some cases, **financial stimulation** for the most vulnerable participants could be considered.

Promotion of the arts education offer should include information in other languages. There is a need to **prioritise hiring translators and multilingual educators** and to **promote languages** used in the local community.

When hosting events, Urban Arts Education suggests **using alternative methods of communication** such as movement, drama, visual art, music, but also encouraging engagement in silence. The first step should be the **recognition of needs and challenges** of participants, **considering different levels** of ability, perception and experience, one-to-one teaching arrangements, and designing the community art projects **not 'for' but 'with' communities**. Pivotal is also the **focus on the process** and **modelling human connection** through practising gratitude, grieving, silence, paying attention, active listening, good questioning, and storytelling. By **creating a safe space**, where students can feel comfortable, secure and connected, **ready for artistic expression**. **Creating intergenerational arts and family education events** help to investigate the qualities that come from intergenerational exchange.

The recommendations also include **support structures for independent art educators** in a form of a network or trade union where teachers could receive psychological help, mentoring, legal and financial advice, look for funding and career development opportunities.

Portugal: bridging realities

Portugal is a small country located on the westernmost point of Europe—the west coast of the Iberian Peninsula. Bordering only Spain by land, Portugal touches the Atlantic from north to south. In fact, this “land planted by the sea” has a strong connection to the ocean that reflects in the Portuguese history and culture. Transitioning from dictatorship to democracy in the 70’s, Portugal takes great pride in assuring freedom of expression and liberty for people, both in socio-political context and in arts and culture, overcoming a past of closedness and prejudice.

Portuguese is the 6th most spoken language in the world, and Portugal holds a long-lasting alliance with the Portuguese-speaking countries, PALOP, in Africa. Migrants from mainly Brazil, Angola, Mozambique and Cape-Verde easily settle in Portugal due to the lack of language barrier. In a time when migratory flows are actively increasing, Portugal is one of the few countries in the EU that welcomes and encourages migrants to stay.

However, there are very often marginalisation issues that arise from the unsuccessful integration of migrants in the Portuguese society. This boosted a growing number of organisations and institutions that promote social engagement, education, inclusion, and mental health of migrants through art-education programmes.

In Lisbon, Portugal’s capital and most multicultural city, where arts have significant expression in urban spaces, there is increased sensitivity towards the wellbeing and inclusion of marginalised groups. This is a relatively recent phenomenon. Before the transition to democracy, artistic education and practices were severely neglected and controlled, with Urban Arts representing a spirit of rebellion and transgression.

However, the lack of strong discussion and formed curriculums, as well as very little acknowledgment of the urban artists and educators who revolutionise the art world, result in a dual reality which on one hand praises the practitioners of Urban Arts, yet still struggles to incorporate their work into the wider cultural context.

To this day, there is a clear lack of democratisation in access to Urban Arts Education in Portugal, mainly due to the lack of information, financial distress, segregation, cultural differences, unattractive offers, educational differences, linguistic challenges and spatial obstacles.

We hope the stories from the Portuguese Urban Art educators and practitioners will contribute to a positive change.

Empower through theatre



Camilo Silva is the director and founder of PIF'H (Produções Ilimitadas Fora d'Horas), a non-profit community theatre based in Braga, in the north of Portugal. Through his company's work, Camilo has developed many educational community projects across the city. The non-formal artistic practices of PIF'H include theatrical processes, which take various forms: from performances, shows and events to presentations of the methodology of intervention and the socio-educational approach to theatre.

PIF'H theatre empowers communities at risk of social exclusion, acts in the defence of their rights and encourages civic participation. Most of all, it aims to create social awareness and offer tools for disadvantaged communities to transform their reality, namely to help migrants learn about the socio-cultural communication.

Camilo feels passionate about the work he develops every day and the role PIF'H has earned in his community. Projects, such as "Ó balha-me Deus!" and NATAL PIF'H — FestivArte D' Alegria bring joy to foster children and teens, disabled people and offer

workshops to teach skills through drama. Age is not an issue, and Camilo still actively takes part in these projects, as an actor and theatre director.

“When talking about territory and culture, we are implicitly talking about community. We provide a welcoming space aimed at promoting the active participation of those who are generally excluded, a safe space for their own social and cultural development and the development of the community.”

PIF'H created several successful initiatives that include all the members of the community. The theatre is a safe space that strongly supports integration of multicultural groups in society, by giving value to the creative potential of people, particularly the marginalised. Camilo takes great pride in the evolution of the company into an educative and inclusive space:

“Community theatre is one of the few things that people from all paths of life can participate in and be equal, regardless of their background”.

URB_ART spoke to Camilo Silva, a passionate actor, staging director and director of PIF'H-Produções Ilimitadas Fora d'Horas (www.fb.com/producoesilimitadasforadhoras) a community theatre association in Braga that develops workshops and activities to help the integration of marginalised individuals.

Picture stories



Filipa Cê is a photographer and a psychologist working and volunteering with marginalised communities and refugees in Portugal, Greece and Afghanistan. Filipa created the Arzo Project to portray the reality of refugees, and to bring awareness about their little-known reality.

“To give a project a title is also to give it a name. Arzo is a Persian name derived from the word ‘arzo’, which means desire, longing, hope.”

This type of exposition allows the proximity, awareness, critical thinking, and dialogue—putting faces on the ‘numbers’ we are used to hearing in the discussion about migration crisis. The Arzo Project was supported by and showcased in the National Immigrant Support Centre (CNAIM) in Lisbon.

Filipa delivers participatory photography workshops for educators, social workers and professionals that work with communities at risk of social exclusion. Participatory photography is a great tool for social inclusion of migrants and refugees, as it supports community members to use images to communicate their needs and challenges, and gives them an opportunity to share their reality with the wider public and decision makers.

“Art has a unique power to evoke emotions, and photojournalism is one of the most faithful-to-the-subject art forms. I chose photography not only as an art vehicle, but mostly as a documental record. When words fail, images speak and immerse us in the stories they contain. One single photograph can touch us deeply and connect us with the portrayed person or

environment. With so many misconceptions in the western countries, it is crucial to promote critical thinking and generate a dialogue.”

Photography as a means of artistic and social expression was chosen by Filipa to make a strong impact on the viewers, to represent the people in our tiny corner of the Atlantic and bring “far away” realities closer, to raise awareness and encourage critical thinking and dialogue.

URB_ART spoke to Filipa Cê, a photographer and psychologist working with marginalised communities and refugees in Portugal, Greece and Afghanistan. (www.projectoarzo.com). Pictures are courtesy of Filipa Cê and CNAIM Lisboa.

Dynamic duo

Kiko Beça & Matias, a DJ duo from Porto, are enthusiasts of hip-hop music culture. Living in a marginalised urban area has impacted their access to this music genre, as hip-hop culture only began to be more influential in Portugal from the 1990s onwards, due to lack of information about it and limited access to the internet. At that time as well as today, the most deprived neighbourhoods of Porto have been a birthplace of many Urban Arts groups and artists of different fields, including graffiti, breakdance, writing, MCs and DJs. Unfortunately, these artists are still confronted with the stereotype of Urban Arts seen as a form of vandalism. Kiko illustrates:

“I grew up interested in underground culture and I always loved music. When I grew up, I started putting my energy and money into creating and producing my own music as an amateur DJ, playing in friend’s parties.”

Kiko supports members of his community by offering music and mixing lessons. Many kids from his neighbourhood, curious about urban music, don't have access to music education, and their interest in this specific genre is not being validated. Kiko does his best to independently support and welcome all of those who want to learn more about the hip-hop, through building an informal network in his community and teaching. With his friend Matias, they form a DJ duo which carries on projects and performs locally.

“I do feel that there is a stereotype associated with Urban Arts, as it is seen as something less positive for society or even of less value,” Kiko adds.

The change of mentalities, the acceptance and support of Urban Arts as a tool for participation and social inclusion is happening mainly in Lisbon, but Kiko hopes that knowledge of the Urban Arts Education will soon reach the whole country.

URB_ART spoke to Kiko from Kiko Beça & Matias a DJ duo from Porto and enthusiasts of hip-hop music culture. They support young teens that have an interest in urban music with mixing lessons, and are also amateur performers, carrying on projects and performing locally (www.instagram.com/djs_kiko.beca_matias).

Urban sounds



F13 LBM, a rapper and hip-hop producer, live and work in the north of Portugal. In his opinion, hip-hop enables feelings of social belonging. It is based on shared experience, as those living in urban peripheries with fewer social and economic opportunities easily identify with the songs and lyrics describing the social reality that they know first-hand.

“Music can have a very special effect on people. Describing my reality and putting my thoughts in my songs is what I love to do. Seeing young people also pursue their dreams and having the chance to help them... I feel accomplished,” states F13 LBM.

For young people and marginalised adults, hip-hop offers a unique opportunity to find understanding and identify with the life story of the artist. Musicians and their audiences form a collective sharing of lived experiences, racial-ethnic conflicts, problems with the police, aggravating stereotypes and social inequalities. Music becomes an inspiration, a means to overcome their daily challenges.

F13 LBM plays an important role in his community. His work is raising awareness about stereotypes, it appeals to teenagers who have gotten off track, and very often discusses the most challenging issues, like the drug addiction. Working also as a tattoo artist, F13 LBM is also committed to deconstructing prejudices and raising awareness about how Urban Arts can contribute to society. As a successful rapper and producer of an independent music label in Braga, F13 LBM supports young people and aspiring artists in getting into the music world. By sharing his knowledge of writing lyrics and beats, he gives them courage to use their voices.

URB_ART spoke to F13 LBM, a music producer and tattoo from the north of Portugal that is part of an Independent Music Label in Braga, informally teaching teenagers and kids about music writing (www.instagram.com/f13lbm)

Portuguese conclusions

The access to Urban Arts Education in Portugal is not limited by communication problems. In fact, Portuguese urban artists and art educators do not experience language barriers when reaching out and working with marginalised communities, since most of the population, whether Portuguese or foreign, speaks Portuguese or is originally from PALOP—five Portuguese-speaking African countries. It's important to remember that in Portugal, English is a compulsory subject in the educational system, and Spanish has a quite lexical similarity to Portuguese. Portuguese inhabitants are also receptive to different languages.

Even though there has been an effort to incentivise and foster emigration to Portugal, marginalisation issues often arise from unsuccessful social integration in the Portuguese society. The main factors of social marginalisation in Portugal are low income and low level of education, social exclusion, religion, race/ethnicity, weak linguistic skills, sexual orientation, rural background, disabilities, gender and age. With this being said, we may assume that in Portugal the Urban Arts Education is not yet inclusive and democratic due to the difficulty in accepting it as a strong bridge for social inclusion, community regeneration and economic growth.

Our research on multilingual and transdisciplinary Urban Arts Education, as well the stories we gathered through interviews and focus groups with urban artists and art educators, concluded that Urban Arts breaks barriers of prejudice and makes members of marginalised communities more confident. However, there is a big need for **formal recognition and acknowledgment of the Urban Arts** from the Portuguese decision makers, support to independent and informal educators. It's necessary to allocate significantly bigger budget for culture and art education, either through **increased funding** helping to **preserve longevity** of the Urban Arts projects, or **greater public awareness** of Urban Arts Education as a means of social intervention and inclusion of vulnerable individuals and excluded communities.

Slovenia: Knitting communities

Slovenia is among the smallest European countries, with small cities and its capital, Ljubljana, having less than 300,000 inhabitants. Albeit safe and economically relatively stable, Slovenia attracts migrants mostly from the former Yugoslav Republics. Slovenian towns are a home to Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian, Macedonian, Kosovar, and others. The immigrants face challenges when attempting to integrate or simply living their best lives in small Slovenian cities and towns, where newcomers tend to stand out. That holds true especially for immigrant women who rarely enter the job market and exit the domestic sphere. Besides migrants, Slovenians too at times struggle to earn a living, to learn useful skills, and feel like active members of the society. As the Baseline Survey on transdisciplinary and multilingual Urban Arts Education suggested, when it comes to Slovenia economic funds seem crucial, but factors leading to social deprivation generally vary.

Marginalised adults do, however, get noticed by some Slovenian NGOs, various art associations, and individual Urban Art educators. They can also be found in smaller Slovenian towns, where they offer a rather rich array of possible activities, not least in the field of arts. One of the specifics of the local art scene is connected to the dissonance between *rural* and *urban*. In more precise terms, what artistic expression means in the countryside is rarely similar to what it represents for urban dwellers. They do not necessarily share the same idea of what art is.

Art is also one of the means of connecting with socially excluded. In what follows, we present stories of four projects successfully affecting the everyday lives of particular marginalised groups in Ljubljana as well as in some smaller Slovenian towns. The Urban Arts content providers are, in a way, just as marginalised as the participants. They situate themselves on the edge of the mainstream Slovenian society, from where they can more easily integrate the participants and knit them into the local community.

All the selected cases show how tremendously important it is for the organisers of Urban Arts Education to know their public. In other words, their accomplishments seem to depend on how well they know the target group, which means that studying the group and their needs goes a long way.

Breakdance and graffiti jams in the city centre



Upon completing compulsory or high school education, many of Ljubljana's young adults find themselves completely marginalised. Those coming from deprived backgrounds are further excluded from artistic activities and lack cultural capital and social bonds. Those who enjoy Urban Arts very often face great difficulty acquiring a suitable venue for their activities.

In Ljubljana, the Bob Institute (Zavod BOB), an association with expertise in non-formal education, youth work, and credentials for applying to public tenders joined powers with the Gor Association (Športno-kulturno društvo GOR) which specialises in promoting hip-hop dance, music, and the movement as such. They recognized the needs of the young people and offered them a space in the underpass of Ljubljana's main railway station. They call it ULCA Youth Center (Mladinski center ULCA) and seek to host hip-hop dance, graffiti classes, and other artistic activities throughout the whole day.

Of vital importance are ULCA's youth workers, who are constantly available to provide all kinds of informal education and support. Its young leaders are simultaneously also experts and active practitioners of Urban Arts. Their enthusiasm is contagious and as Nežka put it, **"young people are attracted to that energy"**. As a result, they have managed to attract a wide range of young people from different backgrounds to participate in ULCA activities, which strengthen their social bonds and provide them with a platform for artistic expression. It is therefore of the utmost importance that committed urban artists get their place in the activities led by non-governmental organisations.

URB_ART spoke with Nežka Agnes Vodeb, the current coordinator of ULCA, social pedagogue and dedicated youth worker. The ULCA Institute (www.ulca.si), founded by the non-governmental organisation BOB (www.zavod-bob.si), offers young people a space to discover and develop their artistic potential.



Knitting a nest



Women from the ex-Yugoslav countries have been a constituent of Slovenian towns for decades. Their presence is well known, while their lives go by somewhat unnoticed. They rarely interact with the mainstream society, have weaker command of the local language, and, all in all, inhabit a sort of parallel world. Ethnic segregation combined with class, religious, and gender inequalities brings along hardships, among them loneliness, lack of meaningfulness, and basic social, cultural, and linguistic skills.

In Jesenice, a small town near the Austrian border, the women from the ex-Yugoslav countries do not remain unseen. Three successful textile designers, Katja Burger, Tjaša Bavcon, and Jasmina Ferček, made it their mission to integrate immigrant women through handicraft. In the frame of their Oloop Institute and with the help of the local Humanitarian Charity Society HOPE (Človekoljubno dobrodelfno društvo UP), the artists came up with a project called Revealed Hands, in which they use art as a path to integration – **“communicating through yarn.”**

They invited the participants to a soothing artistic expression. Many women were already familiar with knitting and other forms of textile design, which gave them confidence. The organisers also noted that many of the attendees simply needed a safe place and a company of like-minded women with whom they could converse and share pride in their products and skills.

An important goal was for the participants to continue meeting. Jasmina, who took part in our focus group, was proud and happy to know the women made friends within the programme, and together they surpassed the programme's limits. After the series of handicraft workshops that brought women together concluded, yet they kept meeting. The project was thus not an end in itself, but a start, bringing along long-term effects. As

Jasmina put it, “we created a nest, from which thankful and happy women flew out.”

The Oloop Institute noticed a social group that was rarely brought into sight; they studied their situation, recognised their needs, and assisted the participants not only by enhancing their afternoons with comforting workshops and chatting, but also through knitting long-term friendships and improving their lives as such.

URB_ART spoke to Jasmina Ferček, (co)head of the Oloop Institute (www.oloopdesign.com), arts educator, and an artist active in different fields of visual arts. Oloop has a history of awarded (Alpine, BIO, Red Dot...) art projects addressing the burning questions of health, ecology, sustainability, and migration.



Women of all winds



A story similar on the first sight to the knitting project in Jesenice was presented to us by Anka Pintar and Nina Arnuš from the Zavod Tri institute, based in the small town of Škofja Loka, nearby Ljubljana. Anka and Nina volunteered in an asylum centre and worked with Albanian-speaking immigrants. It brought them to formalise their work in Zavod Tri, a non-profit organisation encouraging and implementing sustainable community practises. Their projects attract immigrant women from the former Yugoslav republics, who are usually socially excluded. Zavod Tri do not only seek to “help” the women, but also to bring the inhabitants of Škofja Loka closer to them, the integration is hence twofold.

“If you are gentle, you are strong,” is one of the many embroidered and knitted graffiti hanging in the streets, on the buildings and fences in Škofja Loka. Through their project, called Interweaving - Inclusive Communities in Loško, the women tied the threads of friendship while learning Slovenian, integrating into the local community, socialising, and, of course, doing art.

The goal was not only to integrate women through art, but also to promote community participation. Hence, hanging their thoughts and sayings in public spaces in participants’ mother tongues. The graffiti in Macedonian, Serbian, Albanian, Bosnian, English, and

Slovenian now remind the community of the diversity that surrounds them.

The graffiti were well received by the locals, sometimes people would add one, while others would disappear. Yet, Anka stresses that they take this as a compliment, not vandalism.

The graffiti campaigns continue. Some aim to convey a sense of community during the epidemic and increasing social distance, others seek to show that people from different cultural backgrounds, languages, and dialects can cohabit. To summarise, graffiti has the means to promote interculturalism and the integration of immigrant women.

URB_ART spoke with Anka Pintar, co (head) of Zavod Tri (www.zavod-tri.org), an artist and social worker involved in ventures that combine creativity and social activism. The Tri Institute is a non-governmental organisation for sustainable community practises with the focus on empowering women from all parts of the world and developing collaborative processes within the community.



Filmmaking behind bars



Among the most isolated people in Slovenia are the inmates of high security prisons. Prisoners, disconnected from the outside world, are living a life of routine waiting for their penalty to end. Every opportunity to break the monotony and connect to the outside world has a huge impact on their daily lives.

Tone Poljanec, Tina Glavič Novak, and Uroš Lebar from the Cultural Society Center 21 (Kulturno društvo center 21) and the production team Hupa Brajdič attempted to break the inmates' routine with a film workshop. Their goal was to make a feature film. The prisoners were first introduced to film theory and equipment handling, and then encouraged to come up with a scenario – they got to tell their story and decide how they would put it across. They decided on a parody, describing prison as a luxurious place, where one's bags get carried by a clerk, the guards do inmates' daily work, and the convicts have to pretend they are connected to criminal activities to give the guards a purpose and make them happy.

Besides the fun, the workshop provided the prisoners with the opportunity to self-reflect. This is evident in the documentary scenes: we can see inmates pondering on prison life, on themselves, and on their future. The art making experience gave them an opportunity to disconnect from the mundane routine of everyday life in prison and to disrupt the order of the institution, to feel liberated. In addition to that, the organiser added this:

“If we are talking about marginal groups, I think it is important to give them an opportunity to speak, it is important to give them power - to involve them as much as possible in all project implementation processes.”

URB_ART spoke to Tone Poljanec, a filmmaker and a member of Cultural Society Center 21 (www.center-21.blogspot.com) and Hupa Brajdič production team (www.hupabrajdic.com). He focuses on artistic workshops, filmmaking, theatre and other multidisciplinary artistic projects.



Slovenian conclusions

None of the four presented projects were intended for the general populace, nor were they intended for all marginalised adults. On the contrary, Urban Arts educators were at first perceptive enough to really **track specific marginalised groups**: prisoners, immigrant women, deprived youngsters and young adults. Secondly, they were motivated and skilful enough to **study and explore their wishes, needs and competences**. How else would the educators come up with ULCA, a place where chiefly hip-hop lovers come to gather and build their second home? Furthermore, how would some other Urban Arts educators get the immigrants, for instance, the very segregated stay-at-home Kosovar women, to join the project and then continue meeting? In the case of the handicraft project that took place in Jesenice, the project leaders were knowledgeable enough to invite the women to knitting sessions and not DJing sessions because they knew this would make them feel at home, feel capable, and important. Similarly, the members of Hupa Brajdič detected prisoners as those highly stigmatised, they **took time to get access to them, to get a chance to get to know them, meet them, and then finally give them a voice to tell their own story**.

What all the selected stories also share in common is the educators' will to make a difference and bring along long-lasting effects. The projects' **focus on specific groups** was not harmful, quite the opposite. The prisoners indeed recorded only one film, their involvement in the mentioned art project was of short duration, but **they got a chance to reflect** on who they are within that process and managed to obtain some potentially useful filming skills surpassing that concrete project. The long-lasting effects are much more tangible when it comes to the lively ULCA centre, Škofja Loka's constantly transforming graffiti, or the immigrant women from Jesenice, whose friendship indeed formed in the course of the project, but only continues to grow from there.

As already suggested in the Baseline Survey on transdisciplinary and multilingual Urban Arts Education, successful Urban Arts educators share a passion that guides them. They put their all into workshops and other kinds of artistic programmes they are organising. The presenters of these stories get personal satisfaction from assisting unprivileged adults, yet at the end of the day struggle to find financial and general labour stability. Let us hence not forget also about art educators, who deserve to be rewarded.

Essential conclusions

In the URB_ART Story Book, we present twenty accounts of Urban Arts and working with marginalised individuals in the frame of Urban Arts Education. Each of these stories was based on thorough research and interviews with the protagonists—the urban artists and educators who shared their experience with us. The specialists working with deprived communities and excluded individuals provided us with the knowledge and tools they use in their practice, and also entrusted us with the challenges and problems they encounter in their work. Five national reports from Austria, Great Britain, Iceland, Portugal and Slovenia, offer a great amount of expertise, in-depth observations and strategic recommendations that deserve to be widely shared and publicised.

Arts as a language. The power of non-verbal communication.

Dance, music, and visual arts are forms that transcend language. Creative and artistic expressions, gestures, facial expressions and body language are bridge builders. Using art as a form of language is one of the most characteristic and successful strategies in Urban Arts Education. Dance workshops led in a museum can help immigrants acquire the local language. Music and DJ sets can be an ice-breaking exchange between people with and without disabilities. In the informal setting of Urban Arts, a conversation can have a form of building or learning something together. By reducing the importance and dominance of verbal communication, Urban Arts Education offers a voice to those who have been deprived of it because of their social, economic or political status or their physical, mental or cognitive condition.

Multilingualism is the best way to include newcomers

Among the marginalised, immigrants are the group that stands out, because their problems with the acquisition of the local speech are interconnected with their socio-economic status. Urban Arts Education offers multiple tools, including body movement, dance, drama and vocalisation techniques that not only support the process of learning a new language, but also build confidence, a faculty so necessary to immigrants living on the margins of society.

Urban Arts Education proved that presenting the minority languages, inviting the participants to speak using their mother tongues and to create art that celebrates their native languages can have a huge empowering impact. Multilingual approach to education includes also providing information and promotion in the languages, as well as hiring translators and multilingual educators to promote other languages used in the community.



Bringing that mountain to you

Marginalisation is most often associated with social isolation, being alone, living in a secluded and deprived location. The most vulnerable individuals and groups require the art to come to them. That's why driven educators build mobile art vehicles, using refurbished buses and trolleys to bring art to these locations. Others cross prison walls to deliver art to those in need. Another issue, very present among the marginalised, is lack of information. Urban Arts Education requires highly informative, multilingual, intense promotion activities that present participatory offers in an exceptionally attractive way. The promoters need to take an extra step to break through the lack of experience and language barriers, initial reluctance and apprehension among the marginalised.

Safe space

Creating and holding a safe space for others refers to providing conditions for gatherings where people can feel comfortable, accepted and respected for who they are. It can be a physical space, a venue, like a parklet designed for transcultural exchange, or a situational arrangement, created for example by a group of immigrant women knitting together. These particular circumstances enable exchange of experiences, openness to creativity, communication and expression of emotions between the participants.

Being together

What seems to be specific for Urban Arts Education is the focus on the process and being together. The results of the Urban Arts workshops and activities can be only measured in the meaningful, empowering and connecting experiences of their participants, not in the quality or quantity of the final, artistic products they deliver. The essence of Urban Arts Education is building human connection through art. To cultivate connection the Urban Arts educators recommend practising gratitude, grieving, silence, paying attention, active listening, good questioning, and storytelling. Creating, learning and experimenting together in a respectful, welcoming and democratic environment—where participants are co-creators, collaborators, and not only “consumers”—have tremendous benefits and can transform the lives of entire communities.

Investigation and recognition of needs and challenges

Community art projects are designed not ‘for’ but ‘with’ communities. The educators investigate and explore the reality of groups and individuals, creating an opportunity for a group to meet and work together on their terms. Approaching participants on an individual level, getting to know their personal needs and abilities and involving therapeutic and other specialists for consultation, are strongly advised when working with the marginalised.

Funding and financial support of Urban Arts Education

The most marginalised individuals and communities cannot contribute financially to any type of art activities. That's why Urban Arts Education depends on support funding from charities, bigger organisations, local and national administration. Working with excluded low-skilled adults often includes additional costs like hiring translators, child care, accessibility specialists and councillors. Some individuals live in such harsh circumstances that only financial stimulation could allow them to participate in art activities. Additionally, support should be directly targeted and offered in a long-scheme of projects.

Support of independent art teachers

Along with financial support should come other forms of support for Urban Arts Educators, specialists working with the most deprived communities, sometimes in precarious and troubling settings. The work extends their role from an art teacher to a social worker, bearing the traumas and problems of the participants. Support in a form of a work trade union, an association or a network should offer psychological assistance, mentoring, career development and funding opportunities.

National representation

Urban Arts Education is a means for social inclusion of marginalised groups, a discipline combining arts education and social work. The empowerment of Urban Arts Education as a professional endeavour is crucial for the social development of every country. The Urban Arts educators, small and bigger arts education organisations, now dispersed in different fields and urban areas, should unite their forces and create an overarching body of national representation. Such alliances, on regional, national and international scale, would not only allow sharing best practises and give a clear voice to Urban Arts Education, but also allow establishing a strong relationship with the cultural policymakers and administration, and advocating their needs through social campaigns, political lobbying and collective action.



Storytelling resources in urban arts education

“We need to tell stories in order to integrate understanding about ourselves,” said Juan Camilo Roman Estrada, one of our featured Urban Arts educators.

Indeed, there is a great power in telling stories. Within the URB_ART Story Book we strongly advocate the acknowledgment of storytelling as an education and therapeutic tool, but also using its potential to spread both the awareness about the reality of low-skilled adults in marginalised communities and the knowledge about successful strategies of Urban Arts Education for community development.

Stories encourage active imagination. The words and actions reveal images and connect with our experience and imagination. When we listen to stories, our minds create vivid, multisensory images filled with characters and events. By capturing our attention, stories can be a great source of enhancing our imagination, inspiration and creativity. Moreover, telling stories is the most attractive form for teaching and learning, an easy way to deliver complicated or boring content. As long as language exists, stories have been persuading, inspiring, launching changes and motivating us to action.

Learning the stories about personal motivation makes us trust in the experience and expertise of the Urban Arts Educators - for instance, Kerry O'Brien, the former MC and performer based in London, who saved herself from a challenging youth through her connection with music and the creative arts, in particular, Jungle and drum 'n' bass, who now does the same for others, or Lara Parmiani, an Italian-born actress and theatre-maker who powered through the challenges and the exclusivity of English theatre industry, who now offers free drama classes to migrants and refugees. We know that the assessments of these arts educators and their recommendations are based on first-hand, lived experience.

Independent artists, activists and enthusiasts of Urban Arts Education are frequently the first to recognise a social issue and act on it long before an institution or government engages with the problem. These are the pioneers, reaching out to the marginalised, playing a role of catalyst in social improvement. Their stories amaze us, inspire, and show us what is possible.

Austrian media designer and artist Peter Hutter and his collective Konverter adopted a baby pram as a mobile jamming station to travel to social hotspots that are difficult to be reached, where the artist seeks to engage drug addicts, migrants and refugees in to mix music together.

Two young Icelandic female artists organised funds, collaborations, and made research to prepare and run an art therapy program for male inmates of a high security prison. None of them had previous experience or education related to the penitentiary system, however,



both had tremendous amounts of goodwill and deep understanding of the issue.

These are the initiators, the agents of change.

The stories bring us closer, bring us together. We find confirmation in likeness and shared experience. There are similar theatre and drama initiatives in Great Britain and Portugal, that are engaging immigrants excluded from the traditional theatre scene. In the streets of Graz, London and Porto, independent artists use urban music to reconnect with the most marginalised groups. And what's most assuring, all of our protagonists, from Austria, Great Britain, Iceland, Portugal and Slovenia pointed at the preference of using "the language of art" over verbal communication.

Those individual projects and initiatives, when brought together and compiled into a compendium of Urban Arts Education, stop existing in a vacuum. Together they create a magnificent constellation, a rich collection of strategies, methods and ready-to-use scenarios, as well as a deep examination of the social, political and economic background from the perspective of social inclusion.

In the discussion about the situation of Urban Arts Education, we need to underline that the most important outcomes of community art endeavours are visible outside the classroom and aren't easily measurable, because they concern emotional and existential aspects of human life. During the most challenging moments of the COVID-19 pandemic, echoing the slogan "Leave no one behind" is a crucial reminder about those who are omitted by the system and vulnerable to our actions.

With a wish of promoting transdisciplinary and multilingual approach to social inclusion of low skilled adults in marginalised communities, we bring URB_ART Story Book to you, an inspiring and heartening collection of stories which prove that Urban Arts Education is not merely a place of struggle, but a place of a hope for better future.



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