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Recommendations for Policymakers to promote Urban Arts Education

This policy paper addresses the key research results produced throughout the course of the URB ART project, including recommendations to be taken by policymakers and decisionmakers on future European Action to promote Urban Arts Education, in order to realise Its full potential on society. The term Urban Arts Education 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 currently being faced by art educators and practitioners in order to address marginalisation in society, particularly within the realm of arts education, followed by practical recommendations to address them in order to facilitate the inclusion of marginalised communities in Urban Arts Education.

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 realise 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, to empower people with awareness, information, and skills, and to promote 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 a 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, and 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 respected 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 increasingly 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, potential, 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 cultural 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.

Potential of Urban Arts Education

As societies evolve, they are constantly looking for new ways to deal with the opportunities, challenges, uneven backgrounds and wealth disparities that come with an increasingly changing economic and demographic changes. Aligning adult education, arts education and urban spaces can lay the path to social equity by addressing social challenges, and improving social inclusion, development and equality. Our research shows that 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, which contributes to improving 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.

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Challenges

Research results revealed that 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 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.

One of the biggest challenges for institutions and individuals working in Urban Arts Education is financing. According to the participants of our Baseline Survey, their work in the field of art and arts education is primarily funded via public funds. The question of financing turned out to be one of the crucial factors in disentangling the world of Urban Arts Education. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Urban Arts Education. COVID-19 and the following sanitary restrictions decreased the access of marginalised groups to arts. Also, the existing online offer for these target groups is insignificant and reveals problematic language barriers. Finally, there is no accredited curriculum that addresses the potential of Urban Arts Education. Urban arts are a dynamic field of art that requires a flexible approach. It is connected to social messages, to people with different backgrounds, and cultures, to social realities and the urban space. Therefore, there is no box it can fit in, no methodological procedure it can follow.

Recommendations

Independent arts education is impactful – and needs support!

Independent education offers art content, workshops and other forms of formal and informal artistic collaboration that focus less on the artistic skills themselves, and more on enhancing one's overall quality of life and well-being including health[4] as well as bettering community integration. Therefore, independent educators must be supported.

Our recommendations, based on our research, are the following:

- In order for arts education efforts to be sustainable and impactful, there is a need for **agreement on the key objectives and long-term goals** of efforts related to arts education, between policymakers/administrators of government as well as cultural institutions. A good synergy between both is key to achieving a meaningful impact of arts education on society.
- A public funding system that not only focuses on supporting big cultural institutions, but also **independent associations and individuals**.
- In order to ensure that a larger number of applicants are encouraged to apply**, improved dissemination of calls** for funding is necessary, along with **a simplified and low-threshold application process**. The approach towards, and terminology used in the calls should focus on and strive to be inclusive, rather than focus on vulnerability.

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[4] The WHO report on arts and health from 2019 shows the possible impact in this field.

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- **Stable financing** would enable a more permanent and safer environment that many vulnerable participants wish for. Such an environment allows them to open up, and express curiosity, and the willingness to learn. At the same time, the most marginalised individuals and communities cannot contribute financially to any type of art activity.
- **Increased structural funding** is essential to support and ensure the financial sustainability of initiatives working on social inclusion through the arts.
- A similar issue arises when assessing the impacts of a particular project. Public administrators want to see instant and concrete results, while Urban Arts Education is not a quick fix, but a slow process. The **impact should be measured in the long run**.
- Another challenge faced by professionals are the narrow administrative categories they need to fit when applying for funding. An NGO that is, for instance, formally dedicated to helping troubled youth, can often not apply for art-oriented project funding. Public **funding that is open to interlaced fields** would be crucial to support the offer of arts education.
- Governmental support is much needed, yet it is important to **keep arts and arts education independent**.
- **Diversifying advisory boards** to understand and address the varying perspectives and needs of communities, and ensure adequate representation at the decision-making and advisory levels.
- The need for resources to **support 'bridge builders' and 'keyworkers'**, or those who are working as part of cultural institutions with communities. This is important for bridging the gaps between the two groups and creating room for further collaboration.
- Beyond financial support for the arts and arts education: as many educators and artists can't afford premises long term, the **provision of dedicated infrastructure** could make a big change. This way, more numerous or rather better-equipped community centres where arts would be constantly on offer for everyone could be created.
- The need for networks, that can support and include interest groups, creating opportunities for communication and knowledge-sharing, should be faced by providing **platforms and fora for exchange.**

Decentralise cultural offers

As mentioned above, a lot of people from marginalised communities are unaware of existing opportunities for Urban Arts Education. One important solution is to take the arts and artistic activities to urban public spaces. Urban Arts Education thrives when active in neighbourhoods where people feel invited, approaching cultural offers they would otherwise not. In addition, arts taking place outdoors or in open/public places calls for interaction, intrigues anyone passing by, and has a democratic character.

The bridge: educators are crucial for the success of Urban Arts Education

Arts educators are the facilitators to bridge arts with community projects. In addition to artistic skills, pedagogical skills and social sensitivity are required for successful Urban Arts Education projects and community building through arts education. Especially when working with vulnerable individuals, their role in assisting them to overcome fears and insecurities is essential.

Arts educators at times find themselves in the role of social workers or various kinds of therapists, which they are not trained for. Respondents from our survey suggested art centres that also offer psychological support for the most vulnerable participants, as well as supervision for teachers.

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Many educators and artists complained about the lack of support they face, in comparison to regular schoolteachers. Support in the form of a work trade union, an association or a network would offer psychological assistance, mentoring, career development and funding opportunities.

Art Educators and artists need a form of 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, could unite their forces and create an overarching body of national representation. Such alliances at the regional, national and international levels, would not only allow sharing of best practices and give a clear voice to Urban Arts Education, but also establish a strong relationship with cultural, educational and social policymakers and administration, and advocate their needs through social campaigns, political lobbying and collective action.

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About the project

The URB_ART project is co-founded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ adult education 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 conducted 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 indicators 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 Education. The In-Service Training Package on Urban Arts Education (IO3) provided opportunities for urban 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 Community Urban Arts (IO4) showcased successful transnational practices on the involvement of marginalized 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 operational and policy recommendations that have been developed after analysing the results of this project and are aimed at practitioners, decision- and policymakers, and researchers in the crosssectional 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 survey, the project events, and the application-oriented outputs contribute to social inclusion and intercultural dialogue, and how they can support the creative and educational sectors.

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