



★ NETWORKING EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

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Report

Workshop II: Performing Arts and Culture in the City: New Fields of Action for Cultural and Citizenship Education

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Scientific Inputs:

Gabriele Klein, University of Hamburg (Germany)
Katie Milestone, Manchester Metropolitan University (UK)

Project Presentations:

“Bubble the City”
presented by Julius Narkūnas, Laimikis.lt. (Lithuania)
“The angel, the street and happiness”
presented by Anne Rooschütz (Germany) & Andreas Bachmair (The Netherlands)
“THE KNOT”
presented by Joanna Erbel (Poland)

Moderation:

Alicja Pacewicz, Center for Citizenship Education (Poland)

As classical ways of political participation and debating are generally declining, new ways of civic participation need to be detected and discussed. This workshop brought together theoreticians and practitioners creating spaces to share theoretical reflections and practical approaches. The interdisciplinarity of the participants and experts from different European countries encouraged fruitful discussions concerning chances and challenges. Knowledge transfer was stimulated as participants worked towards a mutual understanding regarding artistic and cultural actions and interventions in urban space.



Three guiding questions connected participants from all six parallel hosted workshop sessions searching for

- a) chances of cultural education and
- b) chances of citizenship education in the context of city development and urban spaces as well as aiming for
- c) new perspectives and conclusions by thinking in categories of urban education.

Underground-Mainstream / Inclusion-Exclusion

The first scientific input by Katie Milestone from Manchester University focused on the role of popular culture in a regenerating city. Using the city of Manchester as a case study she illustrated patterns of inclusion and exclusion, marginalization and distribution of power.

Manchester began expanding at an astonishing rate around the turn of the 19th century as part of a process of unplanned urbanization brought on by the Industrial Revolution. Although the Industrial Revolution brought wealth to the city, it also brought poverty and squalor to a large part of the population. Manchester was at the forefront of the 19th-century Industrial Revolution, and a leading centre for manufacturing being known as the “textile city”. However the big success story of the past corresponded with great urban conflict behind the scenes.

Subsequently Milestone outlined a brief historical overview about the development of the cities’ importance as a hub for popular music and club culture within the UK from the 1970’s till present. In the past Manchester has always provided a platform for making connections within the underground scene leading to plenty of opportunities. Musicians from other music hotspots got invited and encouraged to turn ideas and dreams into action (e.g. the Sex Pistols moved to Manchester initiating the punk-music scene). Rare records from US American music centers were not only played here but also made available. The music and club culture soon generated first subculture entrepreneurs such as Factory Record being *the* independent record label in the city. Milestone further refers to Affleck’s Palace, and old property being turned into a type of department store building renting out spaces on a weekly basis. Available urban spaces invited artists to actively shape the culture in the 1980’s as they facilitated participation through micro businesses involving music, media, graphic design, fashion ect. In recent years we have been experiencing a shift leading to hegemonic dominance of the former underground popular culture being actively involved in the mainstream development of Manchester. Factory Records founder Tony Wilson supporting Richard Florida’s concept of “The Creative City” or Peter Saville being appointed the cities “creative director” were named to illustrate that shift. Property development, high-end retail, glass towers and themed city design are just examples of actions leading to exclusionary, mono cultural urban areas. Milestone describes the city as no longer characterized by diversity in terms of social class, gender or race. Whilst many innovative and positive examples of using the cities cultural assets in raising urban areas’ attractiveness can be recorded it also produces fear and dangers. Instrumentalised and institutionalised creativity has ultimately become a tool for branding and consequently serves the process of gentrification. Milestone poses the question and need for action steps in “engaging citizens in a meaningful way” as they seek to create new, alternative spaces distancing oneself from the exploited mainstream.

Aesthetic intervention as political participation

Gabriele Klein from Hamburg University outlined ideas for intercultural citizenship education in the second input, proposing the concept of the city as a stage by exploring the relationship between choreography, performance and urbanity.

Being in a phase of radical changes for urban development from an industrial towards a post-industrial city (by e.g. suburbanization, deindustrialization, segregation) an artistic approach towards these processes is regarded as vital and critical. Urban spaces have been theatricalized, townscapes are marked by staged power embodied in e.g. media-events; nature environments transplanted as event-locations into inner-city areas as seen in city beaches or climbing walls produce new forms of social choreography.

Klein describes social choreography as a concept discussing the aesthetic aspects in social figuration by bringing forth its norms and structures.

Choreographic interventions as public performances firstly established by the New York dance avant-garde in the 1960's using public spaces while experimenting with new forms of movement, expression and artistic action not only take on aesthetic meaning but also social and political relevance. However the scenery of 21st century cities has changed through e.g. "eventism" declaring urban areas as event-locations. Artists started using the concept of performance furthermore for aesthetic reflection, leaving people's involvement not limited to cognitive and communicative skills and but including an aesthetic perception.

Using public spaces as the stage also dissolves the boundaries between actors and audience as all are consciously or unconsciously involved.

"Radioballet" - an audio-guided participatory performance developed by the German based performance collective *LIGNA* illustrates a format of aesthetic intervention in urban space, demonstrating the link between art and politics. Choreographic constructions of gestures of moving bodies in public space reveal inclusion and exclusion schemes as well as power of control caused by capitalist economy yet opening up new spaces for utopian models.

Klein argued, that projects as such evoke new forms of cultural and civic participation, questioning existing social structures by irritating or reflecting upon conventional ways of perception. And performance as art practice creates spaces and new stages while defining these as such in the performance itself leading to a different perception of the city and opening up new possibilities for experiencing urban places.

Klein stated that aesthetic participation of urban culture being a form of political activity cannot be divided into civic and cultural education, into "art" and "culture". Intercultural citizenship education already stands in an aesthetic and political context since social choreographies reflect the connection between art and politics, perception and reflection.

Three different project presentations introduced practical examples towards action steps for using the performing arts and culture in citizenship and cultural education.

Revitalization. Non-formal dialogue.

"Bubble the city" as presented by architect, urban activist and researcher Julius Narkunas from Lithuania articulated the problem of abandoned public places and suggested alternative solutions for reactivating these forgotten spaces. Seeing the area's potential as perfect playground for a wide range of activities citizens got actively involved in forming a positive and emotional gesture by blowing soap bubbles. This gesture revitalizes urban areas first as a regularly happening event, later turning into a ritual. By doing so it creates a meeting platform assembling citizens from all age groups and social backgrounds allowing for non-formal public discussion regarding the dilemma of public spaces. Furthermore this project seeks to develop non-commercial forms of leisure by using a "maximum void paired with minimal material". Participants are encouraged to actively arrange and reflect on the event in their city by e.g. distributing photos via social media.

Upon further discussion within the NECE workshop critical voices raised the concern about possible downfalls as this event or ritual might easily stay on a purely emotional and fun level. Only a reflective and cognitive level would be able to create a sense of fruitful exchange with the outlook for change. However all participants agreed that using the “bubble” as medium to establish an environment of trust and openness could then lead to the citizens self-awareness of them having a voice, subsequently expressed in actions.

Aesthetic education and social network

The community theatre project “The angel, the street and happiness” as introduced by Anne Rooschütz and Andrea Backmair from Amsterdam transformed a chosen neighbourhood into a theatre space, using the inhabitants’ individual voices to create a story with and for them. One of the factors leading to its great success can be seen in the collaboration established with local networks during the preparation phase of the project. The work had to be embedded in an already existing social system of e.g. social workers or a community centre in order to help the two professional theatre makers in creating a safe environment which then allowed for individual voices to be heard. As they stimulated the participants’ creative potential the piece developed in cooperation with the inhabitants. In the course of the process a general appreciation for the arts and culture could be established and introduced the participants to a broader working definition of theatre (as opposed to a traditional text-based black-box-theatre). Furthermore it stimulated a neighbourhood network and encouraged citizens to actively participate in cultural and political activities leading to an aesthetic perception of their own living environment. The theatre makers noted repeatedly that connections with local social workers and a long preparation period are indispensable for the sustainability of the project, especially in prospect of future activities.

Embodied experience

The third and last project presentation by Warsaw based sociologist Joanna Erbel introduced “The Knot”, a mobile platform for artistic presentation and production inhabiting different areas in public space. It creates a “social utopia in urban space”, one month at a time in Berlin, Warsaw and Bucharest. It searches for patterns of communication between different social groups and individuals. Linking the imaginary with the existing it creates spaces within urban areas allowing for new social interaction between local citizens with the artists, practitioners and temporary curators. Composed of materials and human parts the mobile platform seeks to identify issues and barriers within the primarily heterogeneous surrounding as well as stimulating encounter, exchange and experimentation. Discussions about different possibilities in how to use the public space by sharing knowledge on urban space and development are encouraged. Social participation and social cohesion are strengthened in order to support the self-reflective character of the project. “Knot”, polish for “total failure”, as Erbel explains, uses failure as potential for change. Participants are involved in a constant process of working, reflecting and optimizing. The influence this project has on the urban place itself might necessarily not be visible but raises self-awareness of the citizens in regards to their environment and surrounding social groups. Results are seen in the way habits start to change.

Insight

1. Two main issues traversing scientific inputs and good practice presentations during the workshop session relate to **the impact of social media** and **the question of ownership within the city**.

Responses to Milestone's presentation detect the importance of the role social media plays in the described developments exemplary for the city of Manchester as being understated: popularity has taken of. Each new form of participatory action immediately has been exposed and exploited by the media and economic power (e.g. T-Mobile advertises through dance flash mob at Liverpool Street Station). The Media as already largely controlled and privatised uses identical methods transforming artistic practices into media events, which in return requires new artistic ideas to be developed. Likewise urban spaces have been greatly privatised. The boundaries between public and private are blurred and the notion of public space needs a re-definition, as its ownership and distribution of power are increasingly unclear. Klein argues that the idea of public and private space arose from a construct created in our minds (e.g. space can be occupied by fear – mafia).

2. Changes in urban development should involve citizens *and* people in authority, both engaging in dialogue. Citizens often do not realize the full range of rights and possibilities for active participation. Following the presented practice projects the workshop participants recognized and confirmed that **art interventions in public space contain great potential in empowering urban inhabitants** by stimulating a feeling of ownership and identification with urban spaces as well as with other citizens (e.g. cross generational). Finding and creating these spaces for communication responds to the people's desire to feel included and valued in their diversity and complex social structures.

As proposed in "Bubble the City" an artistic action itself can be read as an embodiment of active citizenship participation. And every artistic experience can be educational. All presented projects stimulated the citizen's creative potential and support their individual voices. However the importance and need to articulate problems and challenges in urban areas in regards to post-industrial developmental tendencies ought to be addressed equally.

Related issues within the context of urban space development were briefly broached during the discussion sessions. One of them scrutinized the notion of the "creative class" identifying the trap of the term "creative" as not class constructed and therefore being self-imprisoning. Milestone pointed out the dangers in setting up city designers, restraining changes to nicely constructed buildings while not involving citizens actively or allowing their voices to be heard publicly.

Outlook

Resuming, the presentations and discussions indicated the vital role the performing arts and culture play in developing actions steps for new forms of cultural and citizenship education. Artists as risk-takers uncover invisible control mechanisms, provide opportunities for urban citizens to react and mobilize them for active participation.

Outlined ideas towards possible action steps as compiled by the workshops participants are summarised as followed:

- Each action step requires preparation time and post-processing/evaluation
- Fostering curiosity can be used as a starting point for involvement and education
- Providing opportunities for active participation requires a platform *and* dialogue
- Repetitive action developing into a ritual can as such change into the unknown. The unknown is regarded as potential for change, breaking the routine, allowing for experimentation.
- Acknowledging the potential of failure allows for risk and challenge.
- Aesthetic perception leads to new possibilities for experiencing urban places and identifying with them.

- Every artistic experience can be educational.
- Every aesthetic and cultural education is connected with political aspects and participation.
- Keep things simple. Technical equipment does not guarantee people's involvement in cultural and citizenship education.