

jFrom Music to Creativity – and Back?

Some remarks on the European Year of Creativity and Innovation 2009

Contribution of Michael Wimmer/EDUCULT for “Sounds in Europe” edited by the European Music Council

As one of the outcomes of the 250th anniversary of Mozart’s birthday in 2006 some representatives of the Austrian music business proposed the proclamation of a European Year of Music Education in 2009. The main objective of the initiative at that time was to raise awareness of the importance of music for both the individual and social development of young people throughout Europe. The negotiations with representatives of the European Union made soon clear that – at least in their conception – the promotion of music education was regarded as too limited to one aspect. Consequently a process of “enlargement” started, during which the “European Year of Music Education” developed first into a “European Year of Creativity and Innovation through Education and Culture” and finally into a “European Year of Creativity and Innovation”.

This did not happen accidentally. To explain this process it might be helpful to remember that the European Union started as an economic union based on heavy industries. The Lisbon strategy – starting in 2000 with the objective to make Europe the most advanced economy in the world – was then the respective political document to change from the production of tangible goods in the frame of the traditional industrial infrastructure to the production of goods of intangible character within new concepts of the now so-called knowledge societies. Not coal and steel but information and creativity should become the basic materials of a European economy for the 21st century.

By that it was quite clear that the cultural sector should play an outstanding role in this transformation process, even more since there was increasing empirical evidence that it is mainly the creative industries which contribute above-average to economic prosperity. Yet it also became clear that this strategy causes major challenges for the traditional national education systems up to now not really prepared to stimulate creativity, flexibility and mobility of young people. In this context the official declaration of the European Year of Creativity and Innovation refers to the Recommendations for Lifelong Learning introduced in 2006 which propose the advancement of education from academic achievement to the acquisition of key competences (which comprise the ability to learn, the acquisition of language, science, social and entrepreneurial skills as well as cultural awareness).

This kind of economic instrumentalisation is not everywhere received positively. Particularly representatives of the cultural sector point out that artistic autonomy is in their eyes not sufficiently acknowledged by the authorities of the European Union. Nevertheless, after a long period of negotiations the Council of the European Union adopted the decision proclaiming the year 2009 “European Year of Creativity and Innovation” in November 2008. The main aim of the year is to support “the efforts of the member states to promote creativity through lifelong learning, as a driver for innovation and a key factor for the development of occupational and entrepreneurial competences”.

The good message that might emerge from the final decision to develop the initial idea of a “European Year of Music Education” into a “European Year of Creativity and Innovation” lies in the fact that there are new chances to escape from a narrow and sometimes rather hermetic scene of music production and reproduction. Instead of that, the theme now allows a broader public to actively take part in a discussion what “creativity” and “innovation” are about.

In this context a new quality of debate about “creativity” can be observed. It starts with the assumption that the traditional education system – structured according to the interests of the (old) industrial system – has succumbed to a one-sided form of education and by that wasted

and even destroyed a great deal of peoples' potentials because the value of it could not be seen. To overcome this increasingly unproductive social selection new concepts are going to enlarge "creativity" not only as an attribute for some artists but as a core element of human resources relevant for all members of society. This would mean to make "creativity" a fundamental prerequisite of the current ecologic turn.

This enlarged concept of "creativity" still has its point of reference in the professional art scene. At the same time "creativity" is seen as a function of human intelligence which Fe fosters social inclusion by overcoming the artificial separation between those people who are allegedly equipped with "creativity" and others who are not. Thus, this concept necessarily refers to the development of education not only in terms of music or fine art education. Instead, it envisions a comprehensive concept of implementing new strategies of teaching and learning in all aspects of schooling bringing the individuality of the learner at the forefront of all education efforts. "Creativity" seen as balance between freedom, authority, skill and speculation can be taught to everybody when it is clear that there is no creative learning without creative teaching. And of course "creativity" embraces aspects of diversity in democratic societies when it can be defined as the freedom to constantly see things from different perspectives.

There is a lot of evidence that the inclusion of music and the other art forms in education can considerably contribute to the realisation of this new concept of creativity. Partnerships between schools and cultural institutions can have numerous benefits: they can be effective in developing students' attributes to become creative people; they offer new chances for the development of personal and social skills which are widely ignored in traditional schooling; they can improve students' advancement in other areas like literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology; they can stimulate students' motivation to actively take part in community life and last but not least they can motivate young people to start a career in the creative industries.

Besides all organisational and financial objections, the European Year of Creativity and Innovation can contribute to a comprehensive advancement when "creativity" is regarded as a core and not any longer as a peripheral issue. It should be clear that creativity is not just about feelings but also about thinking – and by that enabling new ways of combining observation, envision, expression and reflection. Creativity is no longer considered as a natural gift for very few but as another way of understanding the world for all, by that as important as the scientific way. And creativity is more than craft; it cultivates habits of mind.

The political decision makers of the European Union set – by proclaiming this year – a framework for redefining traditional conceptions of creativity. It will be up to us to feed this framework with new, refreshing and – yes – creative content. We will see if there is virgin soil in Europe providing ground to realise concepts of creativity appropriate to stimulate and influence the enhancement of our democratic societies. This would be the real success story of this year.