

SUMMER SCHOOL in Vienna
Buffalo's "Arts Management Program"
in exchange with Viennese cultural workers



Study Abroad Syllabus
May 26 – June 3, 2014

Feedback from the University at Buffalo

The summer school in Vienna was in short a tour de force of contradictions and an impressive showcase of a variety of approaches to address or lucratively use the demographically mixed population and infrastructure of this old European metropolis. Not only were students confronted with several conflicting views about integration and what its definition might mean in the context of cultural policy and arts management, they were also exposed to a variety of managerial approaches of running cultural institutions and organizations in such a way to address most diverse audiences. One of the most important contributions of the study abroad program was the unique opportunity that students had by being in a role of active observers of a very different and particular cultural system. This gave them an excellent opportunity to demonstrate and use their analytical skills in critical comparisons whereby the specific context of the Viennese cultural scene would in retrospect enable them to critically assess their local cultural context. This was particularly the case a) with the issues connected with cultural tourism and ownership of the city (tourists or citizens), as well as the problematic effects of advertising a city as an exciting tourist destination and b) also with issues connected to inclusion of various communities particularly of recent immigrants in establishing the programs of cultural institutions. Students were thus exposed to various approaches and were also encouraged to critically engage and compare the differences between cultural contexts.

This intensive education experience was due to a large extent to a great working relationship with EDUCULT on all levels: from discussing the best content and questions to logistics of organizing lodging, meals and transportation so that in such short time we were able to maximize the experience of students. One could even say that organization was handled so smoothly that we didn't even notice the logistical elements of the summer school. A group of very dedicated professionals at EDUCULT, from the director Michael Wimmer to the main coordinator of the summers school Barbara Semmler but also other researchers and assistants, who have thus far organized and managed a lot of demanding research and development projects did an excellent job of making sure that the summer school was such a success.

I wouldn't be true to my sociological training if I did not also mention some minor cracks in this project. They can be considered cracks only because these few instances give us space for future improvement. I should also note, that as with any venture, it is only logical that there were some minor logistical revisions that could be made to enhance the overall experience. This particularly concerns a couple of time-constrained classes, where students would have loved to ask more questions but the program was tightly organized and there was not time. Specifically, this pertains to a conversation with Mathias Naske and Learning from Practice II on Saturday. We also learned that in some cases the discussions and lectures should have had fewer speakers and could have gone more in-depth instead of great variety of views. This concerns the Cultural policies in Europe discussion on Thursday where Monika Mokre could have given an entire lecture on the cultural policy issues. We learned that we could have more activities on the first day and that some of the guest speakers should have gotten more precise and detailed instructions (for instance the presentation at MICA on Tuesday). As the summer school was in progress we realized that lunch should be organized differently and not by ordering lunch packages at the hotel. Also, lunch breaks could be longer so that students can catch their breath.

Again, I should stress that the self-reflective criticism is in fact the result of a great constructive working relationship with EDUCULT. That is, instructor, assistant and host coordinators had a post mortem after the main program of the summer school in order to critically assess the entire program, from each and every speaker to logistical elements, such as lodging and transportation. Conclusion of the post mortem was the summer school in Vienna was an intensive, successful project, which made sense in regards to topic and speakers. It offered students insight into a complex cultural landscape and its contradictions, which were not ignored but analyzed. Hence, the naturally stereotypical image of Vienna and its culture was shattered so that in conversations and discussions with important cultural policy and arts management theorist and practitioners a new elaborated understanding of Vienna was formed. One which, I am sure, will make a lasting impression and to which students will turn when confronted with arts management issues in their own professional lives.

Dr. Katja Praznik,
Director of the UB Arts Management Study Abroad Program

When visiting cities, it is easy to be trapped by what I consider the “marketing plan;” i.e. the concepts, ideas, and happenings a city wants you to see. It might also be referred to as the projected image of the city by a city’s tourism board. EDUCULT swept us past this barrier, exposing Vienna’s cultural underbelly which allowed our students to start their critical analysis.

The well-rounded, extensive, and intensive itinerary gave our students a glimpse at the spectrum that is the Viennese cultural scene. Students encountered the various contexts that allowed their research question – “Mainstreaming Emigrants or Tourists? Towards a new relationship between cultural and integration policy” – to be experienced rather than merely understood. Varied and well selected performances in the evenings played well against the backdrop of intense morning and afternoon seminars and site visits, consistently funneling students back to the research question and feeding their reflection. Participants were challenged to shatter expectations and left Vienna with a far different view of its image and policy than their preconceived notions. Only through the depth of programming offered by EDUCULT could this happen.

When an event runs smoothly you tend to forget the countless hours of fine tuning logistical elements. EDUCULT put in those hours to ensure that the UB Program would run flawlessly. You were most collegial hosts, constantly caring and advising us as we went from institution to institution. We are thrilled to call you educational partners in cultural policy and arts management.

With any event of this magnitude – the arts management tour de force that it was – hiccups can occur. Any of ours were more of an embarrassment of riches than of wanting. Our only wish was to have had more time to enjoy the itinerary so we might further pursue the questions this experience posed and to further engage with guest speakers and institutions. We look forward to correcting this minor mistake in future summer schools.

On the whole – as we reflect back on the summer school 2 months later – we continue to marvel at the depth and scope the summer school managed to cover in 8 short days. The Summer School in Vienna with EDUCULT was precisely the immersive, research driven experience the UB Arts Management Program was looking for. We look forward to collaborating with EDUCULT again in the future, continuing our pursuit of relevant arts management and cultural policy research in Vienna and the rest of Europe.

Kevin R. Leary,
Assistant to the Director of the University at Buffalo