



SUPPORTING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
THROUGH URBAN ARTS EDUCATION

Research Agenda to promote Urban Arts Education

This policy paper addresses the key research results produced throughout the course of the URB ART project, including the need for further guidelines and research on aspects of Urban Arts Education. The term 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 current state of research, followed by the key areas where more research is required to promote Urban Arts Education, followed finally by recommendations for decision-makers and commissioners of research, to promote Urban Arts Education and reap its full potential.



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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 arts¹, urban adult education² and arts education³ can lay the path to social equity by addressing social challenges, and improving social inclusion, development and equality. Urban Arts Education is an effective way to tackle social needs and challenges by fostering lifelong learning, empowering people with awareness, information, and skills, promoting 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.

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.

Approaching people where they are, i.e. in neighbourhoods, in open/public places, 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.

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 in being able to offer arts education practices in urban areas is 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, **strengthening 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 blind spots**. 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.

State of research

While urban arts, community arts, and arts education remain well-explored fields, Urban Arts Education presents a new subject of research. The first step in defining Urban Arts Education along the conceptual triangle of arts education, urban education, and urban arts was addressed in the context of the [Baseline Survey on Multilingual and Transdisciplinary Urban Arts Education](#), conducted by all partner countries. It shows the strong connection of social inclusion and participation with questions of language, but also other factors. Here, the research results encompass the following main themes:

- main factors for marginalisation in the fields of culture and education in urban areas,
- main barriers to accessing community arts in urban areas,
- language characteristics and conditions in urban community activities to promote social inclusion,

- main success factors for promoting social inclusion through Urban Arts Education.

The results show that Urban Arts Education is an effective way to tackle social needs and challenges by fostering lifelong learning, empowering people through awareness, information, and new skills, and promoting local engagement and community building, which contributes to improving social inclusion and cohesion. However, the findings from the Baseline Survey also reveal new questions that are addressed in the following recommendations for future research on the topic.

Desiderata of research

Digital offer and isolation

One of the goals of the baseline survey was to detect how the pandemic influenced the work in Urban Arts Education and what role it could play in the recovery process. The public health advisories and restrictions constrained art gatherings and initially caused distress primarily to artists and arts educators, who feared for their economies and general well-being. Much of the art offers moved to online platforms, often in an innovative and stimulating way, but our respondents agreed that new online opportunities cannot match the in-person activities. More than half of the respondents believe COVID-19 negatively impacted the access that marginalised groups have to art content. Besides, it revealed that the existing online offer is insignificant and increases the chances of problematic language barriers. In the online world, many otherwise meaningful tools of communication disappear. In addition, low-skilled adults might have trouble accessing online content along with other worries, such as monetary commitments, that COVID-19 brought along. On the bright side, the move to online platforms made art content also more accessible to some, especially in countries where urban groups are geographically spread out.

As recent developments show, there are two ways of future research addressing this topic:

- First, the impact of pandemic situations on Urban Arts Education should be researched further to develop and support solutions that can be implemented when similar circumstances reoccur. Therefore, it is crucial to analyse the factors for supporting and hindering participation.
- Second, the consequences of isolation, especially for marginalised groups, and how Urban Arts Education can address this issue is an important desideratum. Here, it is needed to explore the changing cultural interests of people, and how to create social spaces.

Metrolingualism and arts

Even within the same verbal or non-verbal language, some differentiations can produce diverse ways of understanding, adding to social hierarchies and social exclusion. This phenomenon is called metrolingualism, which is a product of modern and often urban interaction and describes how people from different socio-economic backgrounds use the same language in different ways. (e.g. Jaworski 2012: Metrolingual art: Multilingualism and heteroglossia)

The online survey conducted did not contribute much to disentangling the role of metrolingualism in practice. The focus group participants and interviewees, however, talked about the potential of mixing different languages and non-verbal forms, including art expressions of communication, but did not discuss the concept of metrolingualism. Although in general, they emphasised the importance of connecting through arts that can be a language in itself, the respondents of the survey

did not formulate their thoughts and opinions in a way we could talk of metrolingualism exclusively. So, it therefore becomes a topic for further exploration: How and to what extent can art be an additional form of expression for participants with different backgrounds? What are the experiences and opinions of professionals and practitioners in the field about how to include arts as a factor of communication to strengthen common involvement and social inclusion?

Methodological recommendations

While this brief gives an overview of the current needs in the field of research in Urban Arts Education in partner countries across Europe, it is essential to take the local context and needs into account when considering the recommendations presented below.

Co-creative approaches

It is evident that the research can achieve the best results when the subject of the research is incorporated into the methodology. Therefore, it is recommended to use a mixed-method approach, as qualitative and involving target groups in data collection is critical to effectively cover the topic.

Furthermore, a co-creative research approach will lead to more valuable results. Therefore, the most important target groups of Urban Arts Education should be considered as participants in the different research steps. That means including them in designing the research, in the data collection process, in analysing the data, interpreting the results as well as engaging them in the transfer process.

Enlarged target groups

Although the goal was to support low-skilled adults in marginalised communities on their way to social inclusion and empowerment through activities and concepts of Urban Arts Education, the survey respondents, interviewees and focus group participants represented artists and associated arts educators from five different EU countries. People from marginalised communities were a so-called indirect target group, who would benefit from the outputs of the projects at a secondary level.

For future research, it is strongly recommended to include the perspectives and experiences of marginalised groups directly in the data collection. Subsequently, it might be interesting to explore commonalities and differences between the two different target groups.

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), Reykjavik 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 marginalised 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 policy-makers, and researchers in the cross-sectional 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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