

Arts education for social inclusion: Emerging practices from Spain and Portugal

Gemma Carbó, UNESCO Chair in Cultural Policies and Cooperation, University of Girona

Nevelina Pachova, UNESCO Chair in Cultural Policies and Cooperation, University of Girona

Lígia Ferro, Sociology Department, Faculty of Arts, University of Porto

Luísa Veloso, Center for Research and Studies in Sociology, University Institute of Lisbon

Introduction

Over the recent decade both Portugal and Spain have been affected strongly by the European economic crisis. This has led to reductions in public funding and support for artistic and cultural education as discussed elsewhere in this book. In the recent years, however, private foundations have stepped in to fill a part of the gap by offering funding for arts educational projects aimed at reaching out to disadvantaged individuals and groups. Those resources have stimulated the emergence of a range of innovative projects that have brought about a stronger engagement of artists and civil society representatives in arts and cultural education initiatives in the two countries. This paper presents two such projects with the goal of highlighting their experiences and the challenges and opportunities they entail. The research is based on an analysis of project documents and evaluations, interviews with key project representatives and participatory observation. The rest of the paper examines the two projects in turn.

“Planters”: Music, theatre and dance in public schools in Spain

“Planters” is a project of ConArte Internacional, an association established in 2013 with the aim of harnessing the potential of arts education for social inclusion and educational and social transformation. The project was initiated in 2014 with financial support from the Daniel & Nina Carasso Foundation and public funds from some of the participating municipalities. It aims to enhance access to high quality arts education among students from disadvantaged backgrounds in the Province of Girona, Spain as a means of enabling their cultural expression and participation. It does so through the integration of music, dance and theatre classes, co-taught by artists and school-based educators, in the formal curriculum of schools with a high number of students from immigrant and minority backgrounds, engagement of the participating students in local cultural activities, both as performers and spectators, and development and testing of innovative arts educational methodologies and approaches that could help to harness the transformation potential of arts education.

The implementation of the project began in 2014 with a two-year cycle involving 5 primary schools and 3 secondary schools in the towns of Salt, Torroella-L'Estartit and Figueres. The percent of migrant population in those towns is between 26,7% and 40%, i.e. much higher than in Girona city (18,6%), the province of Girona as a whole (14,8%) and the national average for Spain (9.52%) in 2015 (Carbo et al, 2017). The funding of the project was extended for three more years in 2017 with the intention of an increase of the number of participating students from 495 at the end of the first cycle in 2016 to 875 in 2019. The continuation was justified by the successful performance and positive impacts of the project that are documented in the impact evaluation of its first two-year cycle (ConArte Internacional, 2017).

The evaluation looks at the impact of the project on academic performance, educational quality, social cohesion, inter-cultural competencies and cultural participation based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. It finds evidence of a positive and mostly sustained impact of project implementation on all of the examined categories in the case of secondary schools and of less tangible and often harder to sustain impacts in the case of primary school students. The strongest sustained impacts of the project are found to be increased academic performance and motivation to attend school, a more complex notion of creativity, increased relationship with classmates outside the schools, a stronger awareness and knowledge of cultural differences among classmates, increased access to information on cultural activities through the participating schools, and increased attendance of local cultural events, particularly theatre and concerts (ConArte Internacional, 2017).

Limited involvement and commitment on behalf of some of the project participants, difficulties with the development of workable pedagogical approaches for co-teaching large groups, logistical difficulties with the identification of appropriate venues for rehearsals and performances and discrepancies in the timetables of education and cultural institutions were among the notable challenges encountered in the course of project implementation (Carbo et al., 2017). At the same time, however, institutionalized spaced for discussion, coordination and learning, such as the weekly planning meetings between artists and teachers co-teaching the same course, and the monthly working group meetings among the participating artists, educators and administrators as a whole, as well as the flexible, adaptive and pro-active management approaches of a core group of dedicated project staff focused on identifying and capturing windows of opportunities for establishing inter-institutional linkages and cooperation have helped to overcome the major challenges and make the project a success.

“Vitoria 283”, an arts educational project of the Theatre Company Mala Voadora, Portugal

The project “Vitoria 283,”¹ is a project of the Portuguese theatre company Mala Voadora implemented between 2014 and 2015. Like the above-mentioned project “Planters,” it aims to promote social integration through artistic practices. The project was funded by the Gulbenkian Foundation within a programme called Partis.² It involved a group of 42 children and young people aged 6 to 12, living in an historical neighbourhood of the city of Porto – Vitória, where the theatre company is also located. The focus was on children and young people from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds with the goal of enabling them to experience and engage with the arts.

The starting point of the project was the city and the participating children’s representations of it. The final result was presented to the public in the form of an installation. The participants were asked: “what is the city for you?” The goal was not to rehearse a text, in a traditional way, but to build something based on the participants’ experiences, or, as it is written in the project proposal, a collectively built “cartography”. The idea of the project evolved alongside with the process of the establishment of the company in the city of Porto (as it is originally from Lisbon), thus enabling the synergy of the company’s institutional and social development goals.

The project organized various workshops focused on different artistic expressions, such as music and photography and allowed the participants to discover different parts of the city through artistic explorations in the course of the project implementation, while the company

¹ See http://malavoadora.pt/espectaculos/vitoria-283_32.html

² See <https://gulbenkian.pt/project/partis>

presented itself to the city. The project lasted for two years and was evaluated ex-ante, in the course of implementation and ex-post by a representative from an association devoted to the third sector (Association for Social Entrepreneurship and Sustainability of the Thirds Sector) in partnership with the civil society centre of the neighbourhood of Vitória. The final evaluation of the project highlighted two main fields of impact. The first was that of social inclusion, achieved through the collective focus of the project and the relationships established between the project and the surrounding social context, including the families and the local civil society actors. The second was that of artistic creation, involving the participation of children and young people in the design and development of the final presentation called “An entire city inside a city”. In this respect it is important to point out also that the creative process involved the same tools that the company uses in its artistic works: not working on a text or a theme but promoting a collective creative process with various materials.

Conclusions

The projects highlighted above demonstrate different ways of harnessing the potential of arts education for social inclusion. In the case of the “Planters” project, this is achieved through the integration of high quality arts education in the formal educational process at public schools in marginal neighbourhoods and the strengthening of the linkages between the participating schools and the local cultural institutions. In the case of the project “Vitoria 283,” children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are acquainted with various artistic practices and languages through non-formal artistic education and participation. Both projects have arguably helped children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to engage with the arts, gain new skills and knowledge, establish closer relations with other social actors, develop new interests, discover new opportunities, and see themselves as capable of changing their future. The financial sustainability of such initiatives, however, remains an important concern and one that needs to be given due attention given the growing evidence of the societal benefits of both formal and non-formal arts education.

References

Carbó, Gemma, Pachova, Nevelina, Sempere, Núria, Bonal, Ester, Carné, Anna. 2017. Cultural diversity and arts education: Learning from experiences in Catalonia. Meeting of experts 2016: Perspectives of Arts Education in Europe in Times of Diversity and Displacement. 2-3 November 2016, Remscheid, Germany. (in press)

ConArte Internacional. 2017. Evaluación Proyecto “Planters.” Música, teatro y danza en las escuelas e institutos públicos. 1r ciclo: Curso 2014-2015 y 2015-2016. Girona: Marzo 2017.