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1. Boldern, Switzerland

Another Road Map for Arts Education

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Preamble

We value the attempt of the International Roadmap for Arts Education to bring together all stakeholders. But we criticize the process of development of the document: In conversations with participants in Lissabon, and in what Carmen Mörsch observed in Wildbad Kreuth and Danja Erni and Nora Landkammer in the Swiss Unesco meetings, it became clear that critical debates in the development of the roadmap were cut off, ignored or trivialized. This fact makes necessary a supplement to the roadmap which provides space for these discussions.

Critique and Propositions

Contradictions in the Roadmap's rationale

The Roadmap contains certain contradictions which, for us, point to problems:

- Research: while the production of evidence on the impact of arts education is demanded, declaring this evidence as missing, the whole argumentation of the Roadmap is already based on vehement assumptions on this impact.
- The concept(s) of "Culture": "Culture" is used in a contradictory way: on the one hand Arts Education is supposed to preserve "cultural diversity", on the other hand to deliver "universal values".
- What art can do: While in parts of the Roadmap Arts Education seems to contain a sort of promise of salvation and art is seen as having a per se healing impact, the Roadmap also puts Arts Education to the service of political and economic uses (creative industries, nationbuilding, peace). On the one hand art is mystified, on the other hand it is reduced to a tool.
- Economy: On the one hand the Roadmap uses an economic argument to support the assumption on the impact of art education, on the other hand in the rest of the document the reflection of economic and social conditions (i.e. the fact that true cultural participation cannot be realised without political and economic changes targeted to justice and social equality or that art itself is based on and has its own economy) are missing.

Generally we do not problematize contradictions – moreover, we oppose the idea of producing a document which declares a consensus of all stakeholders in the field. What we problematize is that the contradictory arguments are not made transparent as based on different positionalities in the field, but smoothed down to produce the illusion of consensus.

Research

- Research in the Roadmap is basically defined as research on the impact of Arts Education. We argue against impact-focused research which does not guarantee an openness of results because the results are already anticipated (as the Roadmap itself shows, by defining the impact of Arts Education and then demanding research to produce evidence).

- The demand for evidence on the impact of Arts Education is connected to a desire for legitimation of Arts Education. Insisting on this desire for legitimation tends to miss the specificity of teaching Arts and with Arts, it rather presents Arts Education as deficient compared to other subjects in school systems.

What we propose:

- We are interested in research based on discourse analysis – research that is reflexive towards the assumptions and predispositions of the own field

- We propose research that is reflexive towards hegemonial positions.

- We strive to do research that does not make those who presumably profit from cultural education or those excluded from that education its objects, but which is participatory in the sense of a joint production of knowledge.

Economy

- Cultural participation is demanded in the Roadmap, but is conceived predominantly in an economic perspective (participation as consumers of culture and as “creative and flexible workforce”, p. 5). On the other hand the issue of economic conditions of the fields of cultural production and education is not broached throughout the Roadmap. Social and political participation in connection to cultural participation is neither discussed.

- Arts Education is supposed to enhance “critical thinking”, but the Roadmap does not specify the subject of this critical thinking. The fact that critical thinking is mentioned in the same breath with the adaption to the necessities of the labour market (p. 5) leads to the conclusion that critical thinking is mentioned, but not filled – it is thought of as a medium of neoliberal self-improvement.

- Further, the possibility that the occupation with art and cultural production could well lead to the opposite attitude from being part of “a creative and flexible workforce”, i.e. to the active refusal of the individual to function within a neoliberal market system, is not mentioned. But the idea that Arts Education generates an Anti-consumer perspective and refusal has the same probability as the impact hypothesis of the Roadmap.

- The Roadmap is in line with PISA and the debate on visual literacy. „Standards of assessment“ are demanded. In our opinion Arts Education should go far beyond teaching visual competences. Further, standards of assessment have to be reflected critically in perspective of their potential to kill the very specificity of art and art education: to produce situations which generate unpredictable and unsteered outcomes.

What we propose:

- We support the idea that Arts Education should have the aim to enhance critical thinking – as the analysis and critique of conditions in society and to imagine alternatives. We don't want to understand critical thinking as a soft skill and as a preparation for the necessity to act "creatively" in the face of shortage of resources.

Arts Education does not necessarily have to be goal-oriented, and less if the goal is the insertion in structures of economy and state. As an aim of Arts Education we propose: People are able to look critically into a subject and express their insight by artistic means for themselves and others, and are able to deal self-guidedly with cultural artefacts and processes.

- For us it is necessary to name the implicit cynicism of the Roadmap: Arts Education is supposed to have a soothing effect in socially and economically deplorable conditions (see also examples in the last part) and enhance the creative adaptation to these conditions, instead of making these conditions visible or working for their change.

Art

- We think that the definition of artists the roadmap proposes: „fellow humans – often called artists – explore, and share insights on, various aspects of existence and coexistence“ (p. 4) is a useful approach
- We criticize the promise of salvation that is connected to the strengthening of Arts Education in the document, and the focus on transdisciplinary competences that are ideologically charged and oriented towards capitalist usability.
- The roadmap argues for the collaboration of teachers and artists. We agree with this call for cooperation but criticize the implicit hierarchy between the two work fields and the assumption that art teachers alone are not “good enough” (“Good schools alone will never be good enough”, p. 10). The hierarchy posed between the fields of art and education also is visible in the fact that schools are asked to take steps for the realization and enhancement of Arts Education, but cultural institutions are not called on concerning their educational responsibility.

What we propose:

- Specific competences art can transmit should be emphasized: the ability to deal with the uncalculable, with the openness of results and processes, with the ambiguity of meaning and the productiveness of failure, the negation of being reduced to one use, the potential to negotiate difference.
- In our work we question the assumption that what cultural institutions do and show is per se valuable for everybody. We think that cultural participation means also that cultural institutions might have to change

The concept(s) of culture

The roadmap with its concept of Arts Education on the one hand wants to be conducive to “cultural

diversity". On the other hand cultural education is talked about – when it comes to “quality education” – as an education delivering “universal values”. This contradiction leads to the unsettled concept of culture the Roadmap is based on and to its implicit eurocentrism:

- Indigenous peoples“ and „Cultures“ only appear in connection to the preservation of culture (e.g. p.6), which is imagined as threatened (e.g. p6, p.15). This is countered by a concept of Arts Education giving competences for the future (e.g. the subtitle of the conference, “Creative Capacities for the 21st century”, the focus on new media). While the first of the two poles is connected with “awareness”, collectivity and the past, the second is focused on “capacities”, the individual and the future. In this double – binded argument the “indigenous” are denied the capacity to act and to change traditions, culture and cultural education is here reduced to the preservation of heritage. The historical and economic (post- and neocolonial) conditions of the field of culture in different geopolitical regions are overlooked.

- The claim for the impact of Arts Education is connected to a narration of loss. Talking about the “challenges of the 21st century” one example is prominently posed: the decay of the nuclear family (p.5). The narration of loss poses a kind of “hole” that artists and cultural production should fill. From which perspective is this narration told? It sets a model with a specific history in a specific society as universal and, normatively, as an ideal: the western concept of the family as it evolved in the 19th century. Diversifications, alterations and abolishments of this concept which come along with contemporary lifestyles as well with the re-validation of non-western traditions or simply the adaptation to economic conditions, are implicitly marked as declines arts education should work against or compensate. This is opposed to the demand for freedom and diversity of cultural forms in the roadmap.
What we propose:

- If “Arts“ following the roadmap in relation to postcolonial countries obviously means “traditions”, what then are the “Arts“ the roadmap poses as relevant for education in Europe? The IAE will continue to work on this question.

- We argue for a reflexive perspective towards the “culture mash”: the concept of “cultural heritage” should be seen in context and historically, and consequences for today should be drawn out of this reflexion. This is only possible with the guidance and strong participation of the stakeholders specific in each context.

- To “preserve“ is not the only model of dealing with heritage, especially in postcolonial contexts.

- Against this opposition of past and future we argue that the present and contemporary should be the starting point for Arts Education.

- We appreciate the gradual disappearance of the nuclear family as a normative life style and actively support projects which seek to create other narratives than the one of loss.