

THE CULTURAL EDUCATION SYSTEM IN KOSOVO – SEARCHING FOR ALTERNATIVES

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My country has a strong tradition that is very different from yours. In some cases it may seem as if they stand opposite one another. Seen from a historical perspective, we are talking about a region that has been lacking certain values for centuries. My country has recently, in the last six years (since the end of the war), started to experience these values, and it is now making an effort to achieve them. Sometimes, these values have been gently imposed on us, through tutoring. Based on the initial results, for one of the countries that have survived similar tragedies, I can easily say that we are moving in the right direction in trying to achieve the pro-European values mentioned earlier. However, there are many difficulties. After the spectacular involvement of the international community in my country, we have had to all start all things anew from the very beginning. The reconstruction of the country has started, together with the tendency to overcome the damage remaining after the war. Furthermore, the instalment of political institutions, which are facing

my community for the first time since its existence, and other societal reforms have taken place. Education, art and culture in general are also understood to be subjects of change.

Let me stop for a while and discuss education. My university, the only public university in Kosovo, which includes a Faculty of Arts, is relatively young, but not much younger than many of the universities in former-Yugoslavia. It was set up based on the model of the Academies that existed before in our country. The whole system and structure were not better or worse in my ex-country. However, the problems started to be more obvious during the 90s. For 10 years we worked in so-called house-schools. The process of education was affected. Even worse - the whole education system was degraded.

After 1999, the International Community installed itself robustly in our country, in a humanitarian, as well as a military capacity. People in the field of the arts started to realise that the time had come that it

was no longer possible to have only one functioning artistic community. This period marked the start of a new beginning, of new artistic communities and associations, new NGOs working in different fields, including NGOs working in arts and culture. It was no longer possible to have control of information! Also, outsiders interested in Kosovan art started to arrive, mostly thanks to the exotic nature that we were enjoying at that time. Cultural foundations started to show an interest in Kosovo's art scene, but naturally not as a whole.

After 1999, art students started to receive more information, through direct communication: about contemporary means of expression and different art concepts. The majority of artists, mainly young ones recognized the enormous possibilities offered by the open approach towards different art patterns. Incorporating all this in their specific environment and their insistence to work with the problems stemming from their surroundings resulted in very unique forms of artistic expression.

Nowadays the situation is different. The international community has promoted the reform of education. I think that the road ahead of the reforms is a difficult one. There are many reasons for this, such as:

1. The whole body of teaching staff is old, not only as far as age is concerned, but also, and this I consider an even bigger problem, as far as concepts and ideas are concerned (this is true also of the younger teachers);
2. The curricula are old; for 30 years there has been no innovation in academic programmes;

3. The funds for education are very poor;
4. The whole concept of education is very old. The international community is trying to make some minor and superficial adjustments in the same educational system we use now.

According to the existing teaching models, one overriding principle remains: teachers know everything and have answers to all the questions; whilst, on the other hand, students don't know anything, they have come to learn, so that "when they complete their studies, they will know everything too"?!

As a member of Prishtina Art Faculty, the above are some of the persistent characteristics that I dislike. There is a statement that says: "...in case you cannot conquer your enemy you must confuse him".

Somewhat half jokingly I often say: my main "mission" in the Prishtina Faculty of Arts is to CONFUSE ... the students mainly (or artists who happen to pass by). My strategy to reach the others is quite simple: to install DOUBT as a value above and beyond all others, as a top criteria, if teaching in an Art school is to stand any chance of success. Doubt in relation to what is good and what is not good; what can be done and what cannot be done; what is possible and what is not possible. This has to be the driving engine that makes an artist search. And searching may be the final artistic goal, even though it can lead to further results that one had not even expected.

I believe that every person bears within himself a certain dose of creativity. If that be true, the biggest challenge is how to stimulate that creativity, how to avoid stereotypes, and how to be unique in artistic expression, and in general. It is my opinion that, to

achieve this, the approach needs to be totally different - young people who come to study in any of the Art schools, should be treated as artists and personalities that have something to say. One should take the time to listen to them and treat them with dignity, not as people who have come to study art because they don't know anything, but rather as people who already possesses something. Perhaps, what we as teachers should learn, besides knowing how to listen to them, is how to play the role of mediator and moderator, as well as of a resource for providing information on old and new artistic practices, giving basic lectures on philosophy, sociology, communication, etc, while not being restricted to any particular concept. On the other hand, my concern is also how they can maintain their personal approach to life in this time of globalisation - have a personal opinion that reflects primarily the environment in which they live, while their "software" remains compatible with most of the "software" being used in the world of Art today.

So, I am focusing our efforts on these principles, offering a model to young Kosovar art-students of how they could communicate, exchange information, while maintaining, on the other hand, a critical distance from the phenomena appearing in their (broader) environment, and of how to use all of these in their future artistic production.

From my perspective, in order that integration in the cultural (or political, economical, social) Europe be effective, the following are needed:

- To ensure that our educational concepts resemble the educational concepts found throughout Europe, as far as possible;

- To have more freedom in the renovation of the school curriculum, within a common framework and in close cooperation with institutions in Europe;
- To find alternative methods of financing the educational system (for example, to find ways of incorporating the different kinds of foundations or Non-Governmental Organizations, etc.);
- To establish common or mixed educational institutions within Europe, as for example the creation of Franco-German, German-British, British-Italian, or in the near future, why not, Kosovar-Franco, Kosovar-Monaco (as for example the telecommunications in Kosova) artistic academies. When I mention the term "within Europe", I was thinking to have similar academies established in my country as well. The Kosovar-Lithuanian academy sounds nice. Why not?

This last point may seem idealistic. However, we have to believe in utopia, as sometimes everything is reachable, especially in the Balkans, where idealism can become reality. At least people in the Balkans maintain the right to believe in utopia, as an escape from harsh reality or as an alternative for the lack of working systems and rational order, as understood in Europe.

I consider exchange programs as the above as being very crucial for the moment. I reckon these should be more frequent and more ambitious. Why can't, for example, a group of students from my academy come here, somewhere in EU, for a period of three or six months, or a year, to gather the experiences of art education from you, so that they can go back and share their experiences with their peers. Or, why

can't students from my academy study temporarily in Romania, Hungary, or Montenegro?

On the other hand, *why not have students from Europe come to our country? I am sure that Kosova is a very attractive country, as far as artistic inspiration is concerned, a country with completely different temperament than yours, often having a 'positive irrational' organisation of society.*

The above is also necessary for teachers, especially for the younger ones. And we should expect teachers from abroad to come to our country.

There is another issue of European integration that is not directly connected to the educational system (or maybe it is!?), but that is of great importance for improving this system. There should be more exchanges of artistic happenings, such as different kinds of exhibitions, in the first place of students and their teachers, as well as independent artists, workshops of students and teachers, exchange of students both ways, common lectures, etc.

Furthermore, more use should be made of technology such as Internet to communicate, design common web pages, create virtual exhibitions, chat-rooms to communicate, organise videoconferences and even hold videoconference lectures.

I am aware that everything that I have said exists here today. However, I insist to install the above as a natural way of communicating between cultures, to increase the quantity and quality and to work on the further improvement of such manners of communication.

Finally, let me return once again to the current reforms in my country. They need time, patience, cleverness, and above all money. I would please the

European auditory by repeating that the money delivered to my country, through different funds, is not for nothing. It's a direct investment for the future of Europe. For the sake of not having history repeated, we have to reach a balance throughout Europe. Especially in culture, as currently it is highly diverse. So far, a large amount of money has been invested in Kosovo, but not much on culture. The reason for this is simple: culture is not a priority, among other damages remaining from the past. We have to realise that investments in culture are fundamental for the creation of civil society.

Investments in qualitative projects in arts, culture, and especially in education, are direct investments in European cultural integration. However, we have always to preserve the positive specification of each and every culture in particular, in a multicultural and unique Europe.

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