

# Art – Adult education – Politics

A study by uniT as part of the Erasmus project *Fusion of Art and Education*

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# The situation in Austria

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## Basics

The Austrian landscape of adult education is not necessarily easy to survey. There is a very large number of course offerings with a wide variety of ambitions. The majority of offers concerns further education by the Public Employment Service Austria or by companies themselves, that is, the emphasis is on the connection between work and education. The remaining offers come from NGOs and institutions that often vary considerably with regard to professionalisation and size (e.g., staff). Accordingly, those responsible find it difficult to further professionalize their adult education program; attempts remain timid or contradict reality—e.g., trying to establish 'adult educator' as a profession where institutions employ people from a wide range of professions, from retired teachers to supervisors. University programmes on adult education will not considerably change this (P. Schlögl, 2008).

The fragmented and plural situation creates serious disadvantages in terms of quality development, sustainability, job security and payment in this field. One of the reasons for this fragmented structure is that adult education in Austria, in contrast to schools, has developed 'bottom up'. This has, in turn, established some positive structural features of adult education such as "tending towards democratic forms and structures, a high degree of plurality, not being bound by directives, a strong anchoring in the regions—which speaks to the problems and needs of the people" (E. Gruber 2020, 233).

In the context of the present project *Fusion of Art and Education*, in-house training by companies, the offers of the Public Employment Service and other opportunities of vocational training and further education are not so important; rather, in the field of general cultural and political education, cooperations between artists and adult educators are more common.

## Adult education, democracy development and civic/political education in Austria

In the *Fusion of Art and Education* project, we focus on the role of adult education in promoting basic democratic values and participation. Here too, the situation in Austria is everything but satisfactory, with few resources, poor organisation and little public attention. In this context, Filzmaier speaks of Austria as a "political developing country" (Filzmaier, Peter 2005).

There already is a wide range of course offerings in the field of political education in Austria; however, one can also get the impression that it is a "'patchwork rug' that lacks clear contours, competences and liabilities" (E. Gruber 2020,229). Many of the organisers listed on the homepage of the Austrian Society for Political Education come from initiatives and groups, from NGOs and their projects (E. Gruber 2020,229).

What is true for adult education in general also applies to a greater extent to the people involved in political education work: precarious and insecure working conditions, the jobs are extremely underpaid; and the situation tends to worsen (E. Gruber 2020,230).

A brief look at the history of political education after 1945 is worthwhile in order to better understand the situation of civic adult education in Austria. After 1945, those in charge saw no point in conducting a re-education programme as was the case in Germany. Austria defined itself as a victim of the National Socialists and saw no value in reflecting and actively changing their ideology. Yet the Austrian educational landscape before 1945 had been influenced and shaped by a twice fascist structure—not only by National

Socialist ideology but also by Austrofascism, the latter probably with an even more lasting influence (M. Leutold 2002, 138).

From 1945 to the mid-1970s, political education was understood as "affirmative civic and institutional education" (M. Leutold 2002, 139f.). It was not until the mid-1970s that political education began to be seen as a prerequisite for the development of the individual and as a contribution to the realisation of democracy (M. Leutold 2002, 139f.). In these years, two laws were ratified that still today—due to amendments—form the basis for the funding policy in the field of civic/political education (E. Gruber, 2020, 224). The federal law of 9 July 1972 on the promotion of civic education work by political parties, placing political education work in the hands of political parties—as measured by mandates—is essential for the situation today. The second law in this context aims at promoting adult education as a whole, with the exception of in-house education amongst others (E. Gruber 2020, 224f.). Therefore, funding that can be obtained for political education here is sparse. The lion's share of the funding goes to political parties, which of course use it for their own purposes, such as the training of elected representatives, but whose contribution to the development of democracy in Austria must be viewed in a differentiated and critical way and of course always remains within the limits of party-political interests (cf. M. Leutold, 2002, 139f.). In any case, political education in Austria has no place outside the political parties, neither in the broader structure of adult education nor in an institutionalised more durable form (E. Gruber 2020, 224f.). Projects funded by the European Union contain many civic/political education initiatives, but only in project-like structures; those are just fine where the focus lies on the development of innovations, but less so when it comes to questions of sustainability and transfer. Projects simply cannot replace institutional structures (E. Gruber 2020,224f.).

## Art, democracy development and political education

In the fine arts, opinions differ as to the relationship to the political. Riethmüller (2013, 5) describes three positions in determining how art can or should relate to the political:

- 1) Priority of aesthetics over the political: This position can be found in works of Schiller, among others. The value of art is seen precisely in its ability to shake up common sense, the seemingly secure evidence of perception and thought. John Cage, for example, speaks of making the known unknown (Bärthel, Regina; Groos, Renate et.al. 2004, 37).
- 2) Art is political per se. Art demonstrates the unrealised potentials of the way we exist, of what is; it opposes the conditions of the present with a better world. This point of view can be found in Adorno's aesthetic theory, among others.
- 3) Art is radically committed to truth. This point of view can be found, for example, in Hegel's and more recently Badiou's philosophy. In this case, art sometimes takes a backseat and lets other interests come to the fore. This can be found in the staging of political resistance as artistic performance, where occasionally there is no clear difference to 'artless' political activism anymore.

In this context, it is also interesting to note the current tendency to shift aesthetics in the direction of ethics. This became especially apparent in the widespread debate with extensive media coverage about whether a white translator should be allowed to translate an African-American poet as it would result in colonial appropriation, and a white man could not, in principle, adequately translate an African-American woman. As a result, the respective translator withdrew from it.

The desire for correct treatment and sensitivity to all forms of discrimination is evident not only in the discussion about minorities. Also the majority society does not want to be offended by art. Academic middle class, in turn, want to see their values—e.g., cosmopolitanism and self-development—featured through art. All this shapes the design of major exhibitions (Rauterberg 2018, 98ff.). Artists are supposed

to support the middle class that is "in need of strengthening" and become "collaborators of creative modernity" (Rauterberg 2018, 103).

In this regard, it is, in part, difficult for the left-liberal audience to accept that the political right increasingly uses artistic strategies that were originally characteristic of leftist resistance movements. "Anti-institutionalism typical of art" is being appropriated by anti-institutionalists like Trump (Rauterberg 2018, 90).

"Apparently, the freedom of art is shrinking: the more foul-mouthed the right-wing actionists, the more cynical populists like Trump act, the more uninhibited and exalted the völkisch protests against the hated consensus society become, the stronger the general need grows for artists to take on a more empowering, appealing and constructive function, dealing not with the disturbing but with the ethically correct" (Rauterberg 2018, 96).

It is probably this development that makes the inclusion of artists in the endeavour of awareness raising and the promotion of democracy, which we are working on in our project, seem so auspicious.

However, one should not set one's expectations of this involvement too high. Art takes place in the sphere of symbolic action, of trial action, and is, at first, without consequences in everyday life. Direct actions are often much more effective and are perceived more strongly than art. On the other hand, art opens up new spaces, spaces of freedom that are larger than the spaces of freedom in normal life. One particular potential of art is its ability to make taboos visible. This has at least indirect effects. With regard to questions of effect and influence on society, one can speak of the ambivalence of artistic activity (Riethmüller 2013, 4).

Looking at the political theatre of recent times, a distinction is often made between the political and politics. Politics is the politics of everyday life, it is pragmatic, without room for utopias (F. Malzacher, 2020, 36). "To refer to the political (...) is to speak of everything that constitutes a community beyond immediate party competition for the exercise of power (...)" (O. Marchart 2010, 13). It always questions politics—only in this way politics can be a lively engagement (F. Malzacher 2020, 37). However, this understanding runs the risk of becoming too abstract and thus ineffective.

## The relationship of art and education

In this reflection on the triad education – art – politics, which will be accompanying the project *Fusion of Art and Education* as background music, there should also be room for a few thoughts on the relationship between art and education.

In this context, it is interesting to distinguish between education and learning, just like H.C. Koller and others do. Koller understands learning as the acquisition of competence, the absorption of new information. For him, education is more than that, it means changing the whole person (H.C. Koller 2012, 20). Art can initiate such a change as it stimulates the production of new possibilities. Artistic activity, understood in this way, is methodically controlled dreaming. This is the first step towards change (Koller 2012, 26).

These thoughts here correspond to what can be perceived in discussions that seek to define artistic education. The term's scope expands from teaching art at school (i.e., the field of art education) to a concept of shaping one's life, inspired by Beuys' statement that every human being is an artist. Artistic education in this sense means that people should be enabled to shape their lives artistically (C.P. Buschkühle 2017, 4). This can be understood as enabling people to shape their lives in a self-determined and self-responsible way. Schmid uses the term "wisdom" at this point, which one can develop through the training of sensitivity and the ability to perceive (C.P. Buschkühle 2017, 1f.). In addition, artistic engagement challenges a person to formulate his or her own position both in reception and in production

and therefore contributes to the promotion of self-determination and self-responsibility (Buschkühle 2017, 8f.).

Despite all these interesting suggestions for educational work, the cooperation of both fields remains limited to individual projects in the fragmented Austrian landscape of adult education. uniT has taken on the task of connecting both fields, which is rather unique in Austria in terms of the steadiness of this work. In a similar way, InterACT is also attempting this connection in the field of Theatre. Initiatives of this kind also experience opposition: they are perceived neither as art nor as educational initiatives and therefore do not fit the funding frameworks and guidelines.

## Intermediate reflection

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How can all these thoughts on the triad education – art – politics be bundled for specific projects? With regard to the fusion of art and education (in our project connected via a third: politics), the considerations above point to some basic problems one has to reckon with when developing such a project.

### Limitations on *Fusion of Art and Adult Education* projects in Austria

- Adult educators and artists shall take joint responsibility for the content of the project and involve a community (e.g., a participatory project). Both artists and adult educators who concern themselves with political participation work, as already mentioned in the above, in hardly institutionalized contexts and often in personally precarious circumstances. The Erasmus-Call intends to involve artists in adult education in order to open up new fields of work for this group, since often they live in difficult circumstances. In the Austrian landscape of general adult education, however, there are not enough resources to meet this goal in the long term.
- Therefore, such a project can only offer a chance to demonstrate that such a cooperation can be useful and fruitful. However, skepticism is in order here, at least as far as uniT's experience is concerned: In spite of much acclaimed and successful projects in the work with the elderly and the very old—which have followed precisely this dictum of Beuys that every human being is an artist—it is not possible to establish this form of work in a sustainable way. It remains dependent on the skill of the organization in the acquisition of project funds and on the goodwill of the funding bodies to finance this type of project.
- Especially in the field of political education, civic participation and democracy development, the motivation of those in charge seems to be limited when it comes to providing institutions for adult education working in this field with more money.
- For more project sustainability, a cooperation with the Austrian party academies would certainly be advantageous; however, there then is a risk of being appropriated by party politics.
- In the current situation with Covid-19, it is very difficult to win people for participatory projects. At the moment, people are still cautious about public cultural events and it is hardly possible to make predictions about the situation in autumn. This is one of the project's risks that cannot be fully assessed at the moment.

## Chances of *Fusion of Art and Adult Education* projects in Austria

Of course, resources provided by the European Union also offer opportunities to test new approaches and to set the course for the future. One can test and develop exemplarily:

- the involvement of art and artists in political education work and how this cooperation can be facilitated. From the points mentioned in this paper so far, we can grasp important, genuine contributions of an artistic approach in the process of political education:
  - sensitization of perception, which includes the verbalisation of repressed and marginalized issues
  - questioning alleged certainties
  - to position oneself, a necessity inherent to artistic processes
  - free spaces in order to dream in guidance and to come up with alternatives to our current situation
- the promotion of political education and the development of democracy. What is needed here are Europe-wide strategies and a strengthening of the conception that political participation is meaningful and useful—both among citizens and among political leaders. Restricting political education to schools and party academies is not enough. Civic/political education thrives on the participation of all civic/demographic groups (M. Leutold 2002, 136).
- the awareness that democracy is not a permanent state that only needed establishing once. Democracy is zestful; it is in a fragile state whose premises have to be established again and again (E. Gruber, 2020, 232). We will find Gruber's idea confirmed by the current situation in Europe. Especially the disputes with Hungary, but also the events surrounding the pandemic clearly show how democracy is dependent on constant renewal.
- the awareness that political education is also to be understood as lifelong learning, to be anchored across all ages and to be designed according to different needs and interests (cf. E. Gruber 2020, 232).
- a new role for adult educators in political education. The importance of the instruction and teaching of democratic values in a one-way process recedes in favour of models that are more committed to the participation and involvement of those affected and to making their needs and interests heard and visible. This approach is characterized by openness, networking, and the "inclusion of informal and extra-institutional forms of learning" (E. Gruber 2020, 231).

## Practical examples for orientation

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### The Austrian Society for Political Education (ÖGPB)

As already mentioned, in Austria the ÖGPB—a non-profit association founded in 1977—is the most important organization in the field of civic/political education apart from party academies. The ÖGPB tries to promote political education in the field of adult education in two ways:

- course offerings, project consultation, initiatives for further education
- financial support for projects on political education within the framework of Austrian adult education in the member provinces Burgenland, Carinthia, Lower Austria, Upper Austria, Salzburg, Styria, Tyrol and Vorarlberg ([www.politischebildung.at](http://www.politischebildung.at))

The project funding comprises a maximum amount of 4500 Euros per project and is announced annually specified by a theme. Their further education program is primarily aimed at trainers and employees of NGOs.

The annual reports do not reveal any cooperation with artists, the course offerings follow the traditional workshop principle, and a strong involvement of target groups other than trainers and NGO staff is not apparent.

This confirms the impression that the project *Fusion of Art and Education* by uniT is an avant-garde endeavour.

### InterACT, a successful example for artist involvement and participation

InterACT sees itself as a theatre initiative that harnesses theatre for a "culture of dialogue and coexistence, for empowerment and participation, and for processes of personal and social change" ([profile \(interact-online.org\)](http://profile.interact-online.org)). Similar to the work of uniT, InterACT tries to develop and implement participatory projects with the help of artistic and social interventions. It is interesting to note that the term "education" does not appear in InterACT's self-description. They define themselves as a theatre initiative that draws on the aesthetic means of Augusto Boal's Forum theatre. As an initiative that positions itself at the interdisciplinary interface of art, pedagogical political practice and science, InterACT is, along with uniT, one of the few NGOs in Austria that has been trying to implement a connection of art and pedagogy for a long time (since 1999). In an effort to achieve participation and address taboo topics as well as with an ambition to develop new ideas, InterACT corresponds with the above mentioned objectives of our project.

InterACT works with groups that are disadvantaged in and by society to give them a voice, such as unaccompanied refugee minors, prison inmates, and homeless people.

People from the latter group participated in the project *Ware Wohnen Menschenrecht (Commodity Residing Human Right)*. More than 550 people and representatives of organisations were involved. Using the methods of legislative theatre, the participants developed a project report addressed to the political decision-makers in municipal, regional and federal politics. The project took place over a period of more than two years. This work also incorporated experience gained in various other InterACT projects with this target group.

In a community workshop, 20 participants spent three days "staging their own experiences with precarious and challenging housing situations in a theatrical context" (InterACT 2021, 23), testing possible changes and developing proposals for humane and inclusive housing. The themes and concerns of the

workshop were condensed into scenes, and members of the InterACT ensemble developed interactive performances in which the audience could actively participate and contribute their ideas for solutions. The ideas were then discussed in a citizens' assembly. Proposals with a high consensus were included in the report.

This InterACT project is an example of how the nexus of political awareness raising and artistic work can be productive. A certainly very impressive achievement of this project is the potent networking with other stakeholders in the field. Housing issues, a relevant political problem, get a stage and voice by involving groups that particularly suffer from not having access to housing at all, or that have troubles finding housing that meets their special needs.

Legislative theatre offers only one possibility among many. uniT also intends to test other artistic possibilities in its own projects. In accordance with the specific funds as well as the network partners, the InterACT project has a stronger orientation towards social policy, less towards citizenship. This focus corresponds to the general orientation of the entire project towards the development of specific proposals for solutions. We don't necessarily want to take this as a model either; promoting the articulation of problems and strengthening the motivation of those involved in the project to engage in political discussions is challenge enough, especially since the proposed solutions in the InterACT project are not actually implemented. This would require the political formation of will which goes far beyond the project's scope.

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In the 2010 *Fremdsehen* project, 14 artists living in Austria, born elsewhere—e.g., Nairobi, Banja Luka, Istanbul—, brought their own viewpoints to Upper Styrian municipalities, hosted by the district mayors for a fortnight. The latter were fully aware that this encounter with other cultures would be a challenge for the people of their villages and would not only be received with enthusiasm. Nevertheless, they were convinced that a view of their community from an outside perspective could be very stimulating. The project involved artists from a wide range of disciplines—visual arts, film, authors, actors. Each artist blogged about their impressions once a day. At the end of each stay, there was an artistic product that was presented to the local population, but also to an audience from outside. The presentation led to many conversations and reflections on the experiences of seeing Others. Here are some examples:

Pamir Harvey, a Pakistani artist, was a guest in Öblarn, a village that commemorates an old love every five years, namely the love between Archduke Johann and Anna Blochl. Therefore, every five years people from Öblarn stage the play "The Wedding" by Paula Grogger, a poet who comes from this place but has already passed away. This circumstance fascinated and stimulated Pamir Harvey. He wanted to find out what people of Öblarn mean by romantic love, where venal, erotic and spiritual love are to be found. He was interested in the kind of romantic movies and books that are watched and read in Öblarn. In return, he told the people about India, showed Bollywood movies (which are all about love), and cooked Indian food. The presentation showed the differences and similarities in the understanding of love in Öblarn and Pakistan.

Chinese journalist and blogger Jin Yan was a guest in St. Martin. There are many legends there that are connected to the Grimming, a massif in the Dachstein mountains. Jin Yan collected legends and fairy tales from this region by having people tell them and in return she told a legend or fairy tale from her homeland. If people could not remember the story exactly, they were encouraged to re-invent parts. The results were compiled and presented in a book.

The Iranian photographer Maryam Mohammadi was a guest in Selzthal. She researched the everyday life of the past century in Selzthal and visited families who opened their family albums for her and told her their stories. She ended her stay with a photo exhibition about life in Selzthal and Iran in the last century.

This project also serves as a reference for upcoming work in this field. We want to highlight the following points:



- o The role of the adult educators in the project was interesting. They were involved in the whole planning process together with the artists and the participating communities. The adult educators also helped with the design of the final events and functioned as co-presenters. Apart from this, the project was entirely left to the artists and the inhabitants of the places. The adult educators were available as much as possible in case the artists needed moral or other forms of support. Their role was thus limited to concept development, networking and support. There was no instruction, no classical workshop formats. That said, the role of the adult educators was therefore not in the least less important. Other cooperation projects can also profit from this way of going about it.
- o Involving the citizens was also very successful undertaking in this project. The prerequisite for this was, on the one hand, the active role of the artists, who approached the people and were open; on the other hand, this would not have been enough if there had not been people in the villages who supported this project from the beginning and established contacts and relationships. It was helpful that the mayors were sympathetic to the project.
- o This project succeeded in setting a very emotionally charged and sensitive topic such as the encounter with strangers in a positive framework and making the enriching aspects of this encounter perceptible. This cannot be adopted directly, but it gives a direction on how to develop openness for new experiences.
- o This project also picked up on a real strength of artistic approaches, namely to see familiar habits of thought and action in a new light.
- o The project also made it possible to experience how fruitful and stimulating encounters with foreigners can be for a region.

As already mentioned, there are few examples in Austria that focus on the cooperation between adult educators and artists and offer role models and orientation with their projects. Therefore, it is always worthwhile to look at examples from the fine arts, because there you can find projects that offer suggestions for participation, contribute to political education, and express legitimate and little-heard concerns of communities. Such artistic projects serve as inspiration and starting point for the development of own projects that want to try out an artistic approach.

## Projects from the fine arts as reference points

### Joseph Beuys

Joseph Beuys' work remains a point of reference in this area. For him, democracy is not yet established but must be realised to begin with (Beuys/Bongard 1974). He himself formulates it more radically: "both man and art must first come into being, for they do not yet exist" (C. Nichols 2021). His notion is that of a counter-concept coming from the future, a plastic utopia (J. Beuys 1986, 146).

In Beuys opinion, creative potential is inherent to all human beings, enshrined in the well-known statement that every human is an artist. The development of democracy, the development towards a better future is made possible by this creative potential of human beings, provided that people use it and do not "relinquish their sovereignty, but live it out", do not limit their "possibilities of identification, but expand them with the additional category of the artist, which connects them with all other people on earth" (C. Nichols 2021).

Beuys' utopia is has no fixed magnitude, no fixed place, but rather is "a constant impulse, an ever-recurring urge for freedom and justice" (C. Nichols 2021). In his works, he is concerned with initiating processes of change rather than pursuing definite goals or results.

This raises questions that are also relevant for projects within the framework of *Fusion of Art and Education*. On the one hand, this concerns the relevance of Beuys' expanded concept of art. This opens the field of art to all conceivable forms of cooperation. It is about encouraging people to take life with all its aspects in their own hands and begin to shape it; that is, begin to use their creative potential. This conception of humanity inspires and gives hope with regard to the development of our coexistence towards more freedom and justice. Nevertheless, from my point of view, the social aspect is missing in this concept, although not necessarily in Beuys' notion, for whom the "we" was crucial. This can be seen in one of the political questions Beuys raised: Are we a We, could we become one? However, the famous sentence that every human being is an artist can easily be misunderstood and, in the worst case, even functionalized for capitalist purposes, which results in the exploitation of people's creative potentials and not in democratic liberation.

Moreover, recent political events related to Covid-19 also highlight another dimension of the problem: With all the appreciation of diversity, diversity of beliefs can indeed lead to a state of anomie and an increase in conflict among different groups. We certainly experience and witnessed such things in the time of the pandemic with the associated protests, with people acting out their sovereignty. An approach that is purely dedicated to individual freedom is and remains ambivalent in its effects on society. Nevertheless, the idea of social sculpture and the consequences it entails is still relevant today and prepares the way for projects that, like FAE, move within the triangle education – art – politics.

The radical idea of society based on the model of a plastic sculpture includes another train of thought that has already played an important role in the previous pages, namely the need to constantly recreate democracy. Beuys thinks of democracy "as a mindset relying on the creativity, intelligence, participation and communication of all people, an exercise that must always be repeated, a task, a way of grasping life" (C. Nichols 2021). Democracy development can thus mean opening up a space of participation and communication as well as creativity for people. It doesn't always have to come with a manifesto or a resolution outright; in other words, to understand democracy development only as the discussion of currently virulent issues would possibly fall short. This does not mean, however, that including current political and social issues in artistic practice and thus developing tangible proposals for action (cf. the InterACT project described above), is a bad idea, but rather a matter of variety. (See also the distinction between politics and the political proposed in the previous text.)

## Rimini Protokoll: Utopolis

Since 2000, the performance group Rimini Protokoll has been working on opening up and diversifying theatre, involving experts and translating social structures and dynamics into various theatrical formats (<https://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/de/about>). Their project *Utopolis* serves as example.

In *Utopolis* at 48 locations in the city, small groups of spectators gather around a portable loudspeaker. They then visit significant places in the city, such as the court, church, town hall or the university examination hall. They question the spaces, ask how they became what they are—and how they could have been different. They ask questions like: "How do we pronounce judgment and how do we enact laws? How do we organise knowledge and how do we prepare future generations for the future? What do we believe in? How do we want to live together? Audience, hundreds of people altogether, become co-authors of this evening's ephemeral utopias" ([Utopolis - Rimini Protokoll \(rimini-protokoll.de\)](https://www.rimini-protokoll.de/)).

This project ties in with the conception of art as, i.e., proposed by critical theory. One is not content with what is; quite contrary, art suggests alternative worlds. In *Utopolis*, things develop differently: Here, a space and an impulse are offered to allow the participants themselves to develop alternative worlds. Just as already presented in various ways here, this project too is based on a concept of political art/political education that wants to set up spaces and give impulses for networking, creativity and political communication and does not supply content itself but leaves that to the audience; that is, the participants. This kind of project can also be thought of as a cooperation project between art and adult education with synergy effects from the respective expertise of the two fields certainly conceivable.

## L'âge de la tortue

L'âge de la tortue is a cultural initiative located in Rennes seeking to combine art with political and social issues through theatre but also through visual art and photography (<https://agedelatortue.org>).

In our context, the book *L'encyclopédie des migrants* is of interest. This encyclopaedia documents the personal histories of 400 people with a migrant background. 11 cities along the Atlantic have contributed to this artfully designed encyclopaedia. The collection of stories form the source material for performances (readings, songs, music, theatre) in which the stories are presented to the public. (An example of a lecture musicale can be found here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C02uI\\_mEVG0&list=PLeNfzKuvPK2DU8kANYG3Qp8Cut0v6WHb](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C02uI_mEVG0&list=PLeNfzKuvPK2DU8kANYG3Qp8Cut0v6WHb)).

This encyclopaedia project highlights one aspect of participatory political work: If one wants to express their concerns and their situation in an artistically appropriate form, it takes time. On the one hand, time to gain the trust of the people involved so that they are willing to tell something about themselves; time to find an appropriate artistic form; time to continue working with the developed material. L'âge de la tortue managed to invest several years in this project with quite some skill in acquiring funds, also thanks to the European Union. However, they had to take some risks in the process. In the end, it is a project that still has a lasting effect today and potential for further work; however, continuation is uncertain because of the lack of financial support. L'âge de la tortue thus provides a good example of the fact that the same applies to art as to adult education. Combining political-social work with art is only possible in project-like structures, and there is always the danger that sustainability is thwarted.

## Documentary Theatre Studio Vox Populi

This theatre initiative is located in Sofia and has developed its own form of documentary theatre. Their methodology is illustrated by two projects. In the first project, Vox Populi worked with Syrian refugees. They spoke in interviews about their escape and their efforts to gain a foothold in Europe. From these interviews, Vox Populi arranged a script for a play that largely adheres to the original quotes, but selected, edited and framed them from a dramaturgical point of view. The play was also performed by Syrian

refugees. They received the text via in-ear transmission and performed it theatrically. At particular points during the performance, there were also video projections of original interview material.

In cooperation with KUNSTLABOR Graz, Vox Populi realised a project in Graz with the endeavour to take a closer look at a particular district of the city. For more than a year, members of the multi-professional team of KUNSTLABOR Graz spoke with residents of that district, and there were small public performances as far as Covid-19 allowed. It was particularly important for the team in this project to make voices of the district audible that are otherwise easily overheard. Therefore, interviews were conducted and transcribed, a performance developed on the basis of the interview material and was staged in public spaces throughout the district. Unfortunately, it was not possible to acquire people from the district to act in this performance, so they worked with other performers, albeit no professional actors. Here too, original text passages were conveyed through in-ear headphones.

In our experience, this form of documentary theatre offers many possibilities to make voices and perspectives heard and visible. Especially for the work of uniT, this methodology has a lot of potential. Moreover, the uniT team tried something similar with police officers. In several groups we worked with police officers and their experiences in Graz. From this material, four contemporary playwrights developed texts that were performed in the Dramatiker\*innenfestival (playwrights' festival).

## Theatre as place for assemblies

Milo Rau gathered sixty delegates from all over the world in Berlin's Schaubühne to discuss what a charter for the 21st century could look like. A spectacular incident occurs: An Erdogan supporter denies the Armenian genocide. Should this person be expelled or must he endure a truly democratic discussion? This incident makes one thing visible: When the symbolic and the factual meet in a theatre space, certainly a room for experiments, yet one can never ignore reality (F. Malzacher 2020,111).

Milo Rau also worked with theatre as a medium for political assemblies in various tribunals, not only in *General assembly* mentioned above. In the *Moscow Trials*, for example, Rau re-staged the trials against Pussy Riot and also against several artists who participated in certain exhibitions in Moscow. The points of views clashed—on one side the representatives of the freedom of art, on the other the journalists and priests who fought for the primacy of religion.

Assembly formats and negotiations on climate targets, cultural policy and much more are currently taking place on different stages. Social and political procedures are being tested. *Assembly* is understood as a gathering in which established hierarchies are abolished and other forms of decision-making are tried out. An example and model in this context are activist assemblies such as the Occupy Wall Street movement.

Jonas Staal has been organising gatherings with the title *New World Summits* since 2012. These gatherings bring together representatives of organisations that are excluded from discourse and are indeed considered terrorist organisations in many countries (F. Malzacher 2020, 115). "For Jonas Staal, such performative assemblies (...) have the chance to establish new collectivity: a practice in which art, theatre, performance, activism and politics come together and which he calls *assemblism*" (F. Malzacher 2020, 117). These assemblies are artistic settings but also have a direct relation to political and social movements.

These theatre formats, in which symbolic action and, connected to it, the testing of alternatives are combined with the real and the factual, are of course also interesting for the connection between art and education, with art pursuing the dissolution of boundaries. In theatrical assemblies, many groups are involved and work together. There are no privileged positions here. In this respect, these initiatives are very important for clearly recognising how one can and must discuss the political when challenging established hierarchies. This involves risks: the processes can no longer be controlled, disagreeable voices become loud. Participatory political processes are not a unison concert determined by affiliations—neither from the right nor from the left.

## Résumé

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From this research and unit's experiences with cooperations between artists and adult educators, some, at least preliminary, conclusions can be drawn:

1. If one seeks collaboration with artists, then one should also welcome the inherent logic of artistic work. This means that the artistic process can be based on a concept, but it always follows the logic of the material and remains flexible in the process: It is an open-ended process. It neither serves to convey learning objectives, nor does it have to achieve anticipated results. Artistic processes prefer complexity and ambiguity; results occasionally remain ambiguous.
2. This process also changes the role of the adult educator. Instruction becomes less important as a space for exchange and dialogue must be established in which those concerned and involved interact. In this space, the contents and concerns emerge throughout the process. This goes hand in hand with the demands for a meaningful design of political education in adult education, which is why political issues in the broadest sense are particularly well suited for this work (c.f. the concept of *the political* discussed in this paper).
3. Establishing and filling such a space for dialogue asks for people who see meaning in it, who trust that it truly is about them and that they are not instrumentalized for a project. This takes time and patience. Such projects cannot really work under time pressure.
4. With regard to a sustainable impact of these projects, we believe that they give both impetus and impulses, which does not result in continuing or repeating the projects but in embedding it in the consciousness of the communities and organisations etc. to make a difference. There is evidence of this: KUNSTLABOR Graz has made such an experience working with the elderly.

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