

# A matter of Culture and Communication – A Learning, Teaching, Training Activity in the UPCREATE Project

<sup>[1]</sup> Anna Marie Fisker, <sup>[2]</sup> Daniele Sepe, <sup>[3]</sup> Daniela Rimei

<sup>[1]</sup> Professor, PhD, Director of Center for Food Science, Design & Experience. Department of Civil Engineering, Aalborg University. Aalborg, Denmark.

<sup>[2]</sup> Vice Director, AMAT, (Associazione Marchigiana Attività Teatrali). Marche, Italy.

<sup>[3]</sup> Project Leader, AMAT, (Associazione Marchigiana Attività Teatrali). Marche, Italy.

Corresponding Author Email: <sup>[1]</sup> amf@civil.aau.dk, <sup>[2]</sup> d.sepe@amat.marche.it, <sup>[3]</sup> d.rimei@amat.marche.it

---

**Abstract**— *This paper will focus on the state of art of the European Erasmus+ Strategic Project UPCREATE. In UPCREATE, we have been developing new and innovative approaches and methods to connect young people with an educational purpose that combine the themes of Food and Art and our shared Cultural Heritage.*

*The paper will focus on how the combination of European Cultural Heritage, Art and Food as a gastronomical artistic field can spark innovation and entrepreneurship with young people while at the same time fostering social inclusion.*

*The Partners of UPCREATE's aim are to share thoughts on the interdisciplinary activities and the methodological approach that accompanied the interdisciplinary Learning, Teaching, Training Activity where all Partners and 10 European young Artists joined together on a workshop in Venice in November 2022.*

*Before meeting in Venice, each young artist described in an essay their creative main idea, methods of study and techniques, which generally had had a deep effect on the art piece with which they had won the various National competitions. The Partners in the project also described the process of launching the call for the competition, the cooperation with the young artists working and not least the art event where the winners were chosen.*

*Along the way in our work, we asked the question how does cultural identity influence art. In planning the final activity in Venice, an interdisciplinary workshop dedicated to create a Session at the 59th International Art Biennale, we focused on investigating whether it is cultural identity that influences art, or art that constructs culture.*

**Index Terms**— *Art, Communication, Culture, Cultural Heritage, Identity.*

---

## I. INTRODUCTION

The ongoing COVID-19 situation has had and will continue to have, a huge impact on people of all age groups, social classes, and cultural backgrounds. However, among some of the most challenged during the pandemic, were young people and cultural institutions. Educational, cultural and social activities everywhere were severely limited or under lockdown and, consequentially, social exclusion among young people was rising. Among these young people are future artists, creative entrepreneurs, writers, composers, innovators, craftsmen and women, who have a huge potential to contribute to European future society and culture. The situation also severely affects the cultural and creative sectors, and as a consequence, many of them are threatened on their livelihood with museums also generally struggling to attract young people. There is therefore a great need for cultural institutions to renegotiate their identity by interacting with their audience through new innovative approaches.

This is why UPCREATE have created a new interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral partnership between seven partners from five European Countries that will provide and test, new, innovative solutions and opportunities for young people in Europe – and for the European cultural

and creative sectors.

UPCREATE has a partnership of five cultural institutions representing five different disciplines of art, one culinary actor, and a one higher educational institution and is led by Aalborg University, Denmark. UPCREATE are involving the following competent partners: Museum and Galleries of Ljubljana, Slovenia, Associazione Marchigiana Attività Teatrali, Italy, Art Museums Skagen, Denmark, Einar Jónsson Sculpture Museum, Iceland, ARGE Gustav Mahler Festival Steinbach, Austria, and Alchemist Taste Lab, Denmark.

UPCREATE seek to create new, innovative participatory approaches to how young people can engage with, develop and innovate the creative and cultural sectors. Doing so, it is the expectation that UPCREATE will realise new synergies between fields of education, training and youth. Furthermore, by combining two essential cultural fields – Food and Art – in new, innovative ways, UPCREATE will foster the creation of innovative solutions young people can use to face the current societal challenges, and which will support the recovery resilience of the culture and creative sectors.

Along the way in our work, we asked the question how does cultural identity influence art. In planning the final activity in Venice, an interdisciplinary workshop dedicated to

create a Session at the 59th International Art Biennale, we focused on investigating whether it is cultural identity that influences art, or art that constructs culture.

With 10 young artists from very different fields of art, from sculpture, performance, literature, chefs in the field of patisserie to a composer of music we discussed how time, place, and culture influence art. Moreover, whether self-conception or self-perception forms part of a person's sense of cultural belonging.

The young participating artists came to Venice with the experience of working within the themes: Community, Food & Nature (Denmark), Knead - Bread and Art (Iceland), Mahler and Marillenknoedel (Austria), Food and Memory (Italy) and Flavours from the Plečnik's Garden (Slovenia).

Simultaneously to their appearance, discussions among the participating countries were being held, and agreements reached on the defining elements of what makes an innovative approach to the surrealist theme of the Biennale – The Milk of Dreams.

## II. A CREATIVE WORKSHOP IN VENICE

Arranged by the Italian creative organisation AMAT in cooperation with the Italian artistic company 7-8 Chili, the work during the workshop week was carried out considering the basic principles of creative cooperation. A full program for each day was planned and after some introductions the group of young artists and the involved Museums and Organisation began their journey together in groups creating a short video of the theme they had been assigned.

The main goal of the workshop in Venice was that of testing a process much more than obtain an established result: to develop synergy between each group. Studies of creativity emerging from cultural psychology and social psychology perspectives challenge individualist conceptions of creativity to argue that social interaction, communication, and collaboration are key elements in creativity.

According to Stephen Covey [4], synergy is described as “the most catalytic, the most empowering, the most unifying and the most exciting part” of relationships building social interactions. It means, “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts”. The essence of synergy is to value differences - to respect them, to build on strengths, and to compensate for weaknesses. The way to achieve synergy is through the creative process, which often can be terrifying, because it is impossible predicting where the creative process will take a group. The creative cooperation process requires:

- a clear, common, and shared objective to be achieved;
- that the different skills of the members of the group are valued in the name of diversity: mix of backgrounds and experiences improves creativity;
- delayed judgement to guarantee absolute freedom of expression;
- for the same reason rational irrationality: all ideas (even wild ones!) should be welcome;
- communication should always be clear and transparent;

- entertainment: a relaxed atmosphere stimulates creativity;

The process of creative cooperation aims to achieve win-win outcomes. The goal of a win/win paradigm is to ensure that all parties involved in an interaction gain from its outcome. Since all sides benefit from such a scenario, any resolutions to the conflict are likely to be accepted voluntarily. In this kind of process, there is a progression in the communication: from defensive (win or lose/win), to respectful (compromise), to synergistic (win/win) [3]. Synergistic communication must be achieved to develop creative possibilities, including better solutions than original proposals. If synergy is not achieved, even the effort will usually result in a better compromise. High trust leads to high cooperation and communication [4].

## III. THE ARTISTIC GROUP 7-8 CHILI WORKING

The workshop was divided into various phases: after a first phase of presentation of the work, its objectives and some possible experimental tools, the participants were invited to play some physical “breaking ice” games to free themselves from pre-established roles and with the goal to create synergy. It is important to say that the groups was made up of people from very different ages, backgrounds and experiences, being professionals and non-professional and this made experimenting with the process more challenging.

An assignment was given to each group, and the brainstorming phase started: each group produced and shared different ideas, even the wildest ones, according to the work to be carried out. Each group then chose the best proposals, and the work started to be planned and carried out.

In this phase, the groups proceeded in an experimental way, by trial and error, under the supervision of the persons conducting the work. This is the most delicate phase of the workshop because it can generate crises in which the different opinions of the participants seem irreconcilable, and one may need the support of a facilitator in communication, who makes sure that everyone is satisfied and willing to cooperate to achieve the common goal. Therefore, the enhancement of individual skills and the verification of the involvement of all group members by the facilitator are very important elements.

## IV. CULTURAL IDENTITY AND ART

Investigating whether it is cultural identity that influences art, or art that constructs culture we point out that often our identity is constructed by how others view us and how we view ourselves. According to Mary Jane Collier and Milt Thomas there are three components to cultural identity: Individual, Relational and Communal. Individual refers to how an individual interprets his cultural identity based on his experiences. Relational refers to how individuals interact with one and another and Communal identity is the use of communication in the creation, affirmation and negotiation of shared identity [1].

Many arts and crafts projects can engage and appeal to people of all ages. It will however always be a question about how culture affect an artist's work. A question we put up to examine. Rather than comparing different artists under different cultural situations, we took point of departure in the artist's personal artistic career.

The aesthetics and preferences of the artist's creation will often be influenced by the environment, as will the artist's entire artistic career and even his or her life. It means, we think, that an artist's work is influenced by culture.

To some extent, all artworks are products of their culture, reflecting prevailing assumptions and beliefs. The greatest works of art, on the other hand, have the ability to transcend their time of creation. Having focus on the author of the Biennale Theme – Milk of our Dreams – Leonora Carrington, all agreed that her works through time still was actual for everybody. Carrington's focus on a journey through the metamorphoses of bodies and definitions of the human - a magical world where life is constantly re-envisioned through the prism of the imagination. It is, to quote Leonora Carrington, a world where everyone can change, be transformed, become something or someone else.

The actions and interactions of the group, their communal practices reflected the identity of the group. It is possible to identify or study cultural identity in a group by observing everyday situations, communal activities, rituals, holiday celebrations etc. However, on a workshop with a goal as the one UPCREATE had in Venice it was only possible to reflect on how the group managed to deal with their assignment together and importantly how they combined the professional work with the more social part of the project.

We believe that each individual requires a certain level of contact in his or her life, which he or she can only find in the community of other people, and this is what determines the existence of cultural identity.

Having meals together made steps more easy towards teaching culture through art, this combined with the hands-on art experiences in the interdisciplinary group work are an excellent way to teach culture, whether its differences or similarities are found. The meals served with a glass of local wine also made ground for a more social atmosphere that supported the communication between the participants.

Mary Jane Collier and Milt Thomas (1988) theorized cultural identity theory. They combined the ethnography of communication and social construction in order to frame the properties of cultural identity. These properties refer to the manner in which members of a group communicates their identity. According to Collier and Thomas, culture is one of the many identities expressed in communication encounters, and cultural identity becomes evident through social comparison. They highlight that an individual's message during interaction will contain multiple cultural identities for example such as nationalist, racist, ethnic, class related, sex, gender based, political and religious [1].

Collier and Thomas combined the ethnography of communication and social construction in order to frame the properties of cultural identity. These properties refer to the manner in which members of a group communicates their identity [1].

To summarize, the cultural identity is associated with a person's awareness of his own community membership, which allows us to understand our place in the socio-cultural space and freely navigate the world around us.

We acknowledge that most artist belong to a way of self-identification when we are talking about cultural identity. However, at the same time we find it possible to create a sense of belonging to a group that reaffirms itself. It is the extent to which one is a representative of a given culture, based on the behaviourally, communicatively, psychologically and sociologically basis [1].

An interdisciplinary group work consists of several values, meanings, customs and beliefs used to relate to the world. It reflects the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes, which give us as one entity a stable, unchanging, continuing frame of reference and meaning [5].

People's judgments about whether they or others belong to a cultural group can be influenced by physical appearance, ancestral origin or personal behaviour, for example how one dress, speak, have holidays and celebrations. More on for example a historical event, political conditions, who is present, the situation of interaction and public discourse, also affects cultural identity [1].

Cultural identity is dynamic and constantly evolving. It covers the entire life span of a human being and changes every moment based on social context. Cultural identity is the constantly shifting understanding of one's identity in relation to others. Affective, Cognitive and Behavioural Aspects of Identity refers to emotions fully attached to cultural identity in particular situations.

The innovative process to make a video after finding and designing the stories was carried out with great creativeness and all groups were able to gather their work to be presented at the Art Biennale at a Session. However, more valuable was the friendships, the new networks and the exchange of creativity that also was a result of the workshop.

## **V. CAN A CULTURAL PROJECT PROMOTE SOCIAL INCLUSION?**

During the project period, it has also been the aim for UPCREATE to examine the ability of a cultural project to promote social inclusion.

This part of the project was achieved primarily by collecting information from the 10 young artists selected from the National Competitions that the Small House Museums and Cultural Organisations had held. During the workshop a series of professional interviews was held, both involving the young artists but also the partners from the small house museums and cultural institutions. The interviews clearly showed that the young artists had been

---

inspired by the material and events the partners had pre-arranged for the competitions. Most of them were also feeling safer and more encouraged while at the workshop working with other young artists in the same situation.

At the first physical meeting in Venice, and the ever-present Venetian Spritz that made conversation a bit lighter, at that point, the training of the group of young artists was influenced by methodologies available for the works of performance and pedagogical input, as well as by communicative inputs.

Communicate! We all said. There were major innovations during the workshop week in the interpretation and "communication" of works of art, and in the process of creating their joint impact was similar to that brought about by the birth of art itself. The Polach Theatre director and theoretician, educator, creator of acting methods, Jerzy Grotowsky has said; "It is not theatre that is indispensable, but something quite different. To cross the frontiers between you and me." [6].

Calvaresi and Colonnella from the 7 – 8 Chili and Daniela Rimei from AMAT had started the workshop with group connection exercises to activate and listen to one another through a non-verbal channel. Working with food elements connected to the groups theme, such as dough, fruits, eggs and fresh herbs, all the groups were working hard and being creative to combine art and food into the video.

The workshop program also dedicated time for a finalizing theatrical act that was going to be presented and introducing the videos at the Biennale Session. The practice of the act involved orange gloves and beautiful movements by the group of young artist.

## VI. EXPRESSING AND COMMUNICATING CULTURAL IDENTITY THROUGH ART

Artists may use self-portraits or works that is symbolic of ancestry or culture to explore or portray their identity. This could be an attempt to see how they fit into contemporary culture. In order for artists to understand their environment and the world around them, they must first investigate themselves.

In the UPCREATE project the legacy of Cultural Heritage was in different ways being "challenged" by young artists, and many extremely wonderful projects was being born in that process.

The Learning, Training, Teaching Activities led to the birth of innovations in the area of Food and Cultural Heritage, such as storytelling and to the scientific renewal and practice of creative methodologies and techniques. For this reason, the final activity in Venice November 2022 is also of great interest, since this activity was truly a watershed moment, spelling the dawn of Identity, Culture and Communication.

It was clear that after the interdisciplinary workshop ended it had for most of the participants, made an enduring and changing aspect of their identity. As pointed out by Collier and Thomas, the cultural identity changes due to several

factors, which can be social, political, economic and contextual [1].

It is important to mention that a final product of the UPCREATE project will be a Handbook that will note in details this potential. The UPCREATE Handbook will be an instructional guidebook, containing detailed manuals and guides to the different activities and outputs of the project. All material in The UPCREATE Handbook will be formulated and disseminated to ensure that it can be transferred, exploited and implemented 'as is' or scaled to fit specific needs, contexts and capacities. Doing so, the project ensures that relevant audiences can easily benefit from the results. The UPCREATE Handbook will contain recommendations on how other cultural institutions in Europe can further develop the different proved activities in their own specific contexts. The UPCREATE Handbook will therefore be an important tool to secure the intention of wide applicability and transferability of the insights and detailed information developed throughout the project.

It is the aim of UPCREATE to seek to create new, innovative participatory approaches to how young people can engage with, develop and innovate the creative and cultural sectors.

We believe that our work with art have further expressed and communicated the identity of the young artists, and at the same time have realized new synergies between fields of education, training and youth.

Additionally, by combining two essential cultural fields – Food and Art – the workshop results became innovative solutions we can recommend young people can use to face the current societal challenges, and which will support the recovery resilience of the culture and creative sectors.

## REFERENCES

- [1] M. J. Collier and M. Thomad, "Cultural Identity, an Interpretive Perspective" in *Theories in Intercultural Communication*, eds. Y. Y. Kim & W. Gudykunst, International and Intercultural Communications annual (IICA), Vol. 12, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1988.
- [2] M. S. Barrett, A. Creech and K. Zhukov, "Creative Collaboration and Collaborative Creativity: A Systematic Literature Review", <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.713445/full>, August 9, 2021.
- [3] Spangler and Brad "Win-Win, Win-Lose, and Lose-Lose Situations." *Beyond Intractability*. Eds. G. Burgess and H. Burgess. Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder, <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/win-lose>, posted: June 2003
- [4] S. R. Covey, "7 Habits Of Highly Effective People. Paperback – International Edition", January 1, 2000
- [5] A. M. Fisker, D. Sepe and J. H. Christensen, "Towards a Sustainability of Cultural Heritage", 20th World heritage and Ecological Transition, *Le Vie dei Mercanti*, 2022
- [6] Jerzy Grotowski, "Teatro Laboratorio, Tusquets Editores, Barcelona, 1979

**TEAMS AND THEMES**

TEAM 1/BREAD: Ana Porok (Slovenia), Erik Pollini (Italy) and Kalinka Ranfelt-Tørngren (Denmark).

TEAM 2/LASAGNA: AlmaDís Kristindóttir (Iceland), Vladislav Gaspari (Italy) and Fie Marie Kastrup Lindgaard (Denmark).

TEAM 3/HERBS & SPICES: Morten Solvik (Austria), Francesca Persichini (Italy) and Victoria Björk Ferrell (Iceland).

TEAM 4/MARILLEKNÖDEL: Daniele Sepe (Italy), Lan Verko (Slovenia) and Gabriel Backman Waltersson (Iceland).

TEAM 5/COFFEE: Kirstine Bjerrum Voetmann (Denmark), Manca Bogataj (Slovenia) and Carl Tertio Druml (Austria).

