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CULTURAL HERITAGE EDUCATION FOR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT:

In this paper, cultural heritage is considered as an important aspect of intercultural communication and social cohesion, both in local communities as well as on the European level. In European societies of today, the role of the cultural heritage of arts and crafts is under discussion. Attention has turned to the importance of conserving and developing traditional knowledge and techniques. On the basis of this and the practical experiences from craft and cultural heritage projects in Finland and Cyprus, we briefly outline the project plan and its theoretical background. The main idea is to develop a European network of craft professionals and craft teachers who will develop and implement a series of training events and projects. Apart from supporting continuing professional development, the network will also initiate cooperation between artists, professionals and teachers. The aim is to create school and youth projects as well as cooperation between institutions in various countries in order to promote transnational projects. Occupation with traditional arts and crafts is not restricted to formal learning but expands to informal and lifelong learning activities. In this context, the transfer of trans-generational knowledge will be supported through community projects.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Theoretical background

Throughout the ages, people have generated distinctive local cultures and the customs associated with them. These intricate relationships between people, the places in which they live, the ways they conduct their lives and the traditions and rituals that bind it all together, are all aspects of what is called 'cultural heritage'. (Kokko & Dillon 2010.) For centuries, knowledge and skills related to cultural heritage used to be an important aspect of peoples´ lives. The know-how related to local cultural heritage has been passed on from generation to generation, both in informal contexts, especially the home as well as in the formal educational contexts of schools. However, in today's postmodern world characterized by globalization, technology and the quest for economic growth, tradition in its many facets tends to be overlooked and sometimes even scorned as being a relic of older times. The manifestations of local culture in handicrafts, local history and customs are rejected by present day European societies; apparently having no accountable value, they appear to be unnecessary in the modern life-style. As a result, in most European countries the younger generation is out of touch with their countries' traditional culture, a part of their tangible and intangible cultural heritage. This alienation is strengthened by the economic cuts in education resulting in the subjects related to cultural heritage and arts being considered less important and dropped from the school curricula.

This development could be seen just as a normal consequence of changing times were it not for the growing realization that the loss of cultural heritage results in a loss of cultural identity and causes general impoverishment in many aspects of everyday life. Modern society needs to draw on resources and knowledge passed down from former generations in order to compete with the challenges of the 21st century, such as climate change, urbanization and migration.

1.2 Crafts as cultural heritage in the European context

Taking these factors into consideration, the persons presenting this paper have recognized an urgent need to preserve and transfer knowledge about cultural heritage to the younger generation. It would be necessary to see cultural heritage and sustainable development knowledge in this area as a shared resource for dialogue; this could promote, on the one hand, intercultural and intergenerational communication and thus increase social cohesion, while on the other, lifelong learning, youth entrepreneurship and creativity to ensure economic growth and sustainable development. Since the younger generation lacks the possibilities of learning about cultural heritage in their local communities and school, we have recognized that new ways of transferring this know-how are needed.

We are especially interested in particular aspects of cultural heritage which belong to ´crafts´ and ´craft traditions´. These forms of cultural heritage are manifestations of cultures and help in defining them (Lucie-Smith 1981). Craft traditions carry with them a long cultural heritage and knowledge which has been passed on from generation to generation. They include the skills needed to make artefacts and the lifestyles which have been associated with the expression of those skills. (Dormer 1997; Lucie-Smith 1981; Kokko & Dillon 2012.) Craft traditions can therefore be seen as "localised formulations of prescriptive knowledge". Information associated with cultural heritage is preserved in artefacts, tools, practices, modes of communication, lifestyles and in combinations of them all. (Kokko & Dillon 2010).

Eurydice, European Education, the Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, has produced an overview of the state of Arts and Cultural Education at School in 30 European countries. According to this report, "the role of arts education in

forming the competences for young people for life in the 21st century, has been widely recognized at the European level. The European Commission proposed a European Agenda for Culture, which was endorsed by the Council of the European Union in 2007. This Agenda acknowledges the value of arts education in developing creativity. Furthermore, the EU strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training over the next decade, clearly emphasizes the importance of transversal key competences, including cultural awareness and creativity." (Eurydice 2009, 3.) "In 2005, the Council of Europe launched a Framework Convention on the value of cultural heritage for society (Council of Europe 2005), which identified the need for European countries to preserve cultural resources, promote cultural identity, respect diversity and encourage inter-cultural dialogue. Article 13 of the framework acknowledged the important position of cultural heritage within arts education but also recommended developing links between courses in different fields of study. In 2008 the Council published a White Paper on intercultural dialogue (Council of Europe 2008), which offered an intercultural approach to managing cultural diversity. This paper identified educational organizations (including museums, heritage sites, kindergartens and schools) as having the potential to support intercultural exchange, learning and dialogue through arts and cultural activities." (Eurydice 2009,7).

The Eurydice report shows that in two-thirds of the countries, crafts were represented in the curricula. However, the report showed a lot of variation in the curricula of different countries as well as the time allocated to craft education as a part of arts and cultural education. In all of the countries under study, music and visual arts were sectors of art education which were given greater value in the arts curricula.

For decades, UNESCO has paid attention to the importance of preserving World Cultural Heritage. The 1972 World Heritage Convention (UNESCO 1972) links together in a single document the concepts of nature conservation and the preservation of cultural properties. The *UNESCO Young People's World Heritage Education Programme* (WHE Programme) seeks to encourage and enable tomorrow's decision-makers to participate in heritage conservation and to respond to the continuing threats facing our heritage. Launched in 1994, the WHE Programme provides young people with the necessary knowledge, skills, network and commitment to become involved in heritage protection from local to global levels. New pedagogical approaches are developed to mobilize young people to participate actively in the promotion of World Heritage. (UNESCO 1994.)

2. EXAMPLES OF CULTURAL HERITAGE PROJECTS IN CYPRUS AND FINLAND

2.1. Traditional cultural projects in Cyprus

The “Anazitisi” Cultural Centre in Cyprus has initiated a series of youth projects about Cypriot traditional culture; these are mostly funded by the European Youth in Action and LLP programs. The aim of these projects has been to find ways of increasing interest about cultural tradition within the younger generation. Methodologically, this has been achieved by approaching the subject in informal learning situations using project-based teaching. Additional interest has been through the use of modern technology and web 2.0 -based applications. Cooperating with peers from other European countries and making visits for transnational activities, has further increased the attraction of these programs while at the same time supplying information about traditional culture in other countries.

In order to transfer knowledge about Cypriot traditional culture in other European countries, “Anazitisi” has also organized a series of Grundtvig programs. These programs started with the Grundtvig Workshop in 2010, which has been awarded an honorary distinction by the Cyprus LLP National Agency. It still continues today with the Grundtvig/ Comenius In-service Training program “Stitches and Threads- Traditional textile handicraft in Cyprus” which has been implemented five times during 2011 and 2012.

In the last two years (2010-2012) approximately 50 persons have participated in the youth programs and 60 in the LLP programs.Although interest in the program both inside and outside Cyprus is much more widespread, the only obstacle for the participation of more persons is the lack of economic resources. It must be noted that pre-registrations and expressions of interest for these LLP programs have reached the figure of approximately 300 persons in 2 years.

As a result of these programs, cooperation with several European institutions has been established. This has lead to participation in the Grundtvig Learning partnership “EU Treasure Hunt” which focuses on cultural heritage and the younger generation.

2.2. Experiences from an international craft course in Finland

During the courses author a) has arranged for international Erasmus exchange students and Finnish students as part of an International Study Programme for Education, the weak role crafts play in the curricula of various countries has become extremely visible. Before 2010, the name of this international course at the University of Joensuu was "Finnish Craft Education”; this gave information to international students about Finnish cultural heritage in crafts. Later on, along with the merge of the universities in 2010, this same course course was developed into "Cultural Heritage and Craft Education”.

The objectives of this course (see UEF 2012, 14). are stated as being "after passing the course, the students will know the objectives and practices of Finnish Basic Craft Education and will become acquainted with some traditional crafts of Finland both practically and theoretically. The international group will learn to integrate cultural heritage education of crafts into the pedagogy of craft education; they will learn to look at the curriculum of art and craft education from a comparative point of view and to pay attention to the social, cultural, equality and gender aspects of art and craft curricula in Europe. Students will study the practical and theoretical basics of some chosen traditional crafts of Finland. The study unit consists of individual and group exercises concerning various aspects of crafts and craft education both in Finland and internationally. ICT is utilized in finding information about cultural heritage, curricula and the pedagogy of crafts.” In addition, the students will visit a local craft centre. An important aspect of the course are the group discussions and essays the students write about the role of craft education in their respective countries' comprehensive school and teacher education course.

Essays and discussions have made it clear that crafts are almost non-existent in most European schools and generalist teacher education. Many young students participating on this course who are mainly future generalist teachers themselves, recognize the danger of losing their cultural heritage of crafts because crafts are also not practiced in most of their homes either. Some of them have learned crafts from their older relatives. (Kokko & Dillon 2010.) Finland and other Scandinavian countries are the only places where crafts are clearly represented in the curriculum of comprehensive schools as standard school subjects.

Up to now the Finnish craft curriculum has supported the traditional gendered division of crafts at school; most of the girls have studied textile crafts and most of the boys have studied technical crafts as wood and metal work. (Kokko 2009, 2011.) As a consequence, gender may have restricted the pupils´ involvement with various forms of crafts in Finland. This was not the case in most of the other countries represented in the course. When crafts were present in the curriculum, the content was the same for all pupils.

3. INITIATIVE FOR A EUROPEAN NETWORK ON CULTURAL HERITAGE AND CRAFT EDUCATION

Considering the role of arts and cultural heritage as a means for facilitating intercultural communication, we maintain that an increase in the importance of these subjects in school curricula and education in general, can function as a bridge to overcome problems caused by cultural diversity.

As is stated in the white paper on intercultural dialogue launched by the European Council (2008, 33): "Cultural activities can provide knowledge of diverse cultural expressions and so contribute to tolerance, mutual understanding and respect. Cultural creativity offers significant potential for enhancing the respect of others. The arts are also a playground for contradiction and symbolic confrontation, allowing individual expression, critical self-reflection and mediation. As such, they naturally cross borders, connect and speak directly to people's emotions. Creative citizens, engaged in cultural activity, produce new spaces and potential for dialogue. (…) Europe's cultural heritage can provide the backdrop to the plural European citizenship required in contemporary times."

Since the problem can be identified in almost all European countries it is particularly important to establish means of cooperation between individuals and institutions in order to ensure the transfer of knowledge and good practice on the European level.

Based on this insight, from as many European countries as possible, we aim to initiate a European network which will bring together craft teachers, teacher trainers, artists, professionals in the field of crafts and other institutions, as well as decision makers involved in this field.

The first aim of this network will be to conduct research on the status quo of craft education in Europe today. On the basis of this research, we plan to develop in-service teacher training courses on a transnational basis leaning on the findings of Eurydice about the state of the professional development of arts teachers in Europe: "Continuing professional development (CPD) is a professional duty for teachers in the majority of European countries. However, the participation of arts teachers in CPD programmes is not regulated separately in most cases. Instead, general regulations on CPD usually apply to arts teachers as they do to all. As a result, there is little available information about the participation of arts teachers in CPD and their opportunities. Nonetheless, when such information exists, it shows that CPD for arts teachers receives little attention in many countries. Some of the national monitoring reports on the quality of arts education highlight the fact that arts teachers need to participate in good quality and appropriate in-service training. These reports, which exist in a dozen of countries, draw their conclusions from the results of standardised tests given to pupils, school inspections or surveys." (Eurydice 2009, 79.)

Apart from supporting continuing professional development, the network will also initiate cooperation between artists/ professionals and teachers, to create school and youth projects, also to promote cooperation between institutions in various countries for the creation of transnational projects. It is important that occupation with traditional arts and crafts is not restricted only to formal learning but will expand to become informal and lifelong learning activities. In this context the transfer of trans-generational knowledge will be supported through community projects bringing together members of the older and the younger generation and so support an increase in social cohesion.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we are of the opinion that enhancing the importance of craft education both in formal and in informal contexts will have positive results for the development of European society through supporting intercultural and trans-generational communication and understanding as well as youth entrepreneurship and creativity. Starting with cooperation between Finland and Cyprus and widening this cooperation to as many EU countries as possible, we aim to increase the importance of traditional skills and knowledge and show that their transfer into the 21st century will open new possibilities for sustainable growth and social cohesion.

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