

Porto Seminar

Question VI:

What role is there for the artist or museum-educator when working with young people? What are the ethical implications? Can artists encourage broader participation and community cohesion?

Group members:

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Artist/ Museum-educator

Often there's the problem of combining the word artist with the word educator because an educator can be an artist but less often an artist becomes an educator. Our first problem was defining and choosing a term to determine our role; words such as co-learner and co-educator appeared.

Our main concerns/ challenges:

How to create a different experience for young people in the museum? Art is often seen as something disconnected from their daily life. How can a museum-educator approach and relate these apparently distant worlds?

Some possible answers:

As museum-educators our role has to be a more creative, organic, imaginative and constructive one. We have to provide young people an empowering and "special" experience.

When combining museum-education with contemporary artistic practice the idea of process is placed in the centre. The main purpose isn't the final object but to share a common language. It is through visual language, provided by the museum and oriented by museum-educators that young people can experiment, express and find other worlds (the artist world and the visual world that the artist presents). They can share thoughts, concerns, hopes, expectations and then start building something together, strengthening the ability to participate and to take action.

Ethical implications

Different points came up at this stage:

One was related to the museum-educator's concern of combining the artistic background and practice with the role of an educator;

The other was concerned with the need for long term projects in order to overcome the situation in which we hear young people saying "it was fantastic so what? Now I have to go back to school..."; what happens after the end of a project?

And finally the ethical implications for artist-educators working in communities and the kind of relationships they are able to create (What is the goal? Is it to produce an artwork? Or is it to involve a certain community in an artistic process?).

Our main concerns/ challenges (about the second ethical concern):

Are our projects in deprived areas only serving a political agenda or are they really engaging with people's lives?

Is that engagement positive for the youngsters or in the end only allows them to realise what they don't have?

Does anything change at the end? Do young people become more active and positively involved citizens?

Some possible answers:

Art by itself won't change the order of things and won't make the world a better place.

The work developed by museums and galleries with communities in deprived areas (social housing neighbourhoods, prisons and others) should be extended to those surrounding young people (for example to the ones responsible for their education). It is important to be aware of this fact because it may create the space and context for a more interesting and effective practices.