



Art-mediation and Inclusion

Educational programme in the frame of *Agents of Change*: *Mediating Minorities (MeM)* project

March – December 2021

The MeM project funded by the Creative Europe programme aims to explore the potential of the art-mediation approach in building more inclusive societies. It is jointly organized by Cultura Foundation (Finland), Tallinn City Museum (Estonia), Tensta Konsthall (Sweden), Foundation for an Open Society Dots and Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art (Latvia).

Objective

The programme aims to educate art-mediators with a special focus on art as a platform for diversity, minority issues, and social change so that they can become Agents of Change for their societies. The course offers international exchange, useful tools, and knowledge about different ways to participate and to influence public discourse.

What is Art-mediation?

Art-mediation is an umbrella term and different institutions mean different things by it. The common denominator is an idea of equal and meaningful dialogue about art that enriches all its participants, regardless of their backgrounds, and knowledge. Mediation is a process of building relationships when all participants are fundamentally equal. This opposes the common idea of transferring ready-made knowledge or opinions from a more informed person to a less informed one. Mediation suggests treating each person as an expert in their own experience, and culture.

Dialogue and Inclusion

The goal of the course is to provide future art-mediators with means for facilitating such kind of dialogue. In order to ensure that participants of an art-mediation get a quality experience in communicating with art, and with each other, it is important to create a safe non-judgmental space, in which everyone shows respect and attention to their own and others' feelings and thoughts. Creative and inclusive communication is a skill that one can learn. In this project, we operate on the belief that the very experience of the mediation might be meaningful for a person, as it evinces the value of diversity. So, it seems to us that art-mediation can be a means of developing inclusion. Or rather, it can foster such forms of consciousness that make inclusion a default way to build relationships.

Content of the Programme

The students participating in the course will get acquainted with the theoretical foundations of mediation. Why do cultural institutions rethink relationships with their audiences? How can art be a

force for social change, and why are diversity and inclusion so important? How may the public participate in the processes of art and knowledge production? How has the paradigm of education changed, and what does the educational turn in curating mean for art? The course includes lectures combined with interactive workshops, peer-to-peer exchange, and independent tasks. At the end of the course, the students will cooperate with artists to design and conduct artistic participatory projects in relation to the general public. The mediators thus apply their newly obtained competences to communicate socially-engaged art, ensuring that an array of voices is included and that minorities as part of civil society have a say.

The Programme in Short

The programme starts with 12,5 weeks (March-May 2021) intensive course divided into four modules. Each module (3 weeks) consists of two lectures with the following Q&A and discussion sessions (online); two local workshops (offline if possible) followed by the online exchange in [Howspace](#), the platform for digital collaboration. There are also three international exchange meetings. Generally, the course consists of two events per week, on average 7 h per week for the participants, plus peer-to-peer exchange and self-guided work. Later on, for five days during the first week of August, the art-camp gathers 40 mediators from Sweden, Estonia, Finland and Latvia to exchange their experience in the great scenery of Kuldiga. The realisation and communication of the joint projects with the artists finalize the programme in September-December 2021.

Learning Through Doing and Exchange

We suppose that the role of mediators is in a sense natural for multilingual representatives of minorities, for people with personal experience of exclusion of any kind, as they already live between cultural worlds. They are experts by experience in intercultural communication and the aim of the course is to make possible that the bridge-builder mission becomes a way in which to apply their own creativity. We hope that their devotion to diversity would become a force that increases awareness and inspires action.

How can we convey mediation and inclusion as concepts not only through the content but also through the design of the programme? The educational activities should be seen as a system of human relations, so that networking, exchange, and, thus, shared knowledge production might happen along the way. Communication is considered the core part of the programme, to ensure that the idea of meaningful participation drives the mediators' interests and the realisation of the course on all levels.

Educational Modules I – IV

I. ART-MEDIATION AND DIALOGUE

What is art-mediation? Why do art and culture institutions use this word so differently?

Is it possible to make a dialogue equal and overcome prejudices and hierarchies? How to engage different people in dialogue and provide each of them with support, so that they feel safe and inspired? How to include various points of view?

Why do art and cultural institutions change their relationships with audiences? What does audience orientation mean in contemporary art and why it has gained urgency recently?

II. ART & SOCIAL CHANGE

What is socially-engaged art and what is art to do with social change? Can an artistic work be a vehicle for transformation?

How does art contribute to daily life and how people can gain new social experience from encounters with art?

Why is participation so important and what pitfalls this concept implies?

III. DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

How to embrace diversity with respect and integrity? What are intercultural competencies and is it possible to gain them?

How to ensure recognizing multiple identities that each of us bears and the right to choose from them freely? How a work of art might offer the discovery of the 'other'?

What do we mean speaking of 'sense of belonging' and how art addresses symbolical and emotional connections of a person with a locality, a group, a story, an idea?

IV. CONFLICT ZONE

Why do so many contemporary artists address decolonization issues? What decolonization means in the countries that never have been colonies or colonial powers? How the decolonial critical thought questions the very logic and system of existing knowledge?

How to make the decolonization discourse less confrontational and more productive?

Why artistic vision is what we need to approach controversial social issues productively? How art gives us a license to act beyond the existing frameworks?

What particular local issues do we want to address in our collaborations with artists in MeM projects?