Report on policy synergies for arts-based education across Europe

Summary

Recent policies of the European Union and its member states incorporating arts-based education are in the process of developing or enhancing synergies with other policies fostering intercultural dialogue, creativity, critical thinking and innovation. A comparison of current efforts in creative skills development through arts-based education with EU policies in the areas of economic development, social inclusion, technology, cultural literacy and education identified a number of synergies and complementarities in terms of policies, programmes, practices and funding that are relevant for the development of children and young people in their national environment and across Europe.

EU Policies

Education policies related to the promotion of cultural literacy and arts education are consistent with several other European and national policies aimed at social inclusion.

Cross-sectoral synergies and complementarities exist between the following policy frameworks and programmes.

- Economic development policies, as defined in the European Commission's Competitive Compass, European Employment Strategy and other strategy documents and supported by the Structural and Investment Funds of the EU's Cohesion Policy. Together with the guiding and monitoring instruments of the European Semester's coordination process they are geared to build a more resilient, competitive, inclusive and democratic Europe. Skills development has been identified as one of the priorities in this context, with an important part to be played by the cultural and creative industries as an economic sector.
- Social policies aimed at promoting employment and social inclusion, improving living and working conditions, providing social security and advancing gender equality. The European Pillar of Social Rights has been built around twenty key principles considered essential for social cohesion, with 'education, training and life-long learning' as one of these principles. Its Action Plan led to the adoption of a European Child Guarantee inserted into the EU Youth Strategy fostering 'engaging', 'connecting' and 'empowering' young people while providing them with the necessary resources to take part in society. The EU's social policies are supported by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).
- EU policies fostering the development of new technologies in order to 'close the innovation gap' and accelerate the 'twin digital and green transition' as one of the EU's top priorities underpinned by skills development and Research and Innovation (R&I). The European Research Area (ERA) has been established to increase the competitiveness of European research institutions and encourage coordination between national and regional research programmes. These are mainly supported by the Horizon Europe programme. In addition, the Digital Decade Policy Programm includes a number of targets for Europe's digital transition in conjunction with the Green Deal Industrial Plan for the Net-Zero Age, aimed at reducing carbon emissions for a climate-neutral Europe by 2050.
- EU culture policies, guided by the European Commission's New European Agenda for Culture and a series of multiannual Workplans for Culture. These are complemented by the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage, promoting an integrated and participatory approach to cultural heritage. EU culture policies are supported financially by the Creative Europe programme in close collaboration with other funding instruments such as Erasmus+, ESF+, ERDF and Horizon Europe. From the outset, the Creative Europe programme aims at developing synergies with education and youth policies, employment and social policies, R&I policies, regional, urban and rural policies, the EU's Single Market, Rights and Values, and Digital Europe programmes and external action policies.
- Education policies within the European Education Area (EEA) as the strategic framework for EU cooperation in education and training, aimed at skills development and inclusive education and with links to other educational policies.

Key Findings

There are significant complementarities and synergies between EU and national policies incorporating arts-based education and other policies aimed at social inclusion and fostering intercultural dialogue, creativity, critical thinking and innovation.

Policies, programmes, practices and funding related to arts-based education are linked to policy frameworks and programmes addressing economic development, social inclusion, digital and other technologies, R&I, cultural literacy, and education.

EU education policies are primarily concerned with cooperation between member states and the development of skills, and less with guidelines for the actual integration of arts in education systems, which is being applied differently in each member state, even when national policies also point at cross-sectoral synergies and their implications for skills development and social inclusion.

At the level of school curricula, arts-based education is closely linked to collaborative and active learning pedagogies, which, despite an extensive body of literature and research, have hardly been explicitly translated into EU and national policies so far.

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Progress towards achieving its objectives is being monitored through the annual Education and Training monitor of the European Semester process. EEA initiatives include the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), the Digital Education Action Plan and a number of online platforms aimed at connecting teachers and classrooms across Europe. The main funding instruments for EU education policies are the Erasmus+ and (to some extent) ESF+ programmes.

National Policies

National reports on arts-based education contexts from the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland show that the exposure of children and young people to the arts in formal and informal education varies from country to country, between urban and rural settings, and according to social status. Whereas formal education systems in the member states are similar, approaches to the integration of the arts and culture in primary and secondary education are rather different, due to their diverse cultural and historical backgrounds. Culture and cultural heritage as well as policies aimed at tolerance and social inclusion are high on the agenda of government policies but implementation in formal education is mostly weak.

Nevertheless, arts schools, informal arts-based education and grassroots cultural activities are flourishing in each of the sample countries. The bulk of financial support is provided by national and local authorities, but in many cases aligned with EU policies and the various EU funding programmes. In each of the sample countries, the cultural and creative industries constitute important (albeit fragmented) economic sectors. Due to historically uneven political and economic development, their main characteristics (film, audiovisual, software, publishing etc) are different from country to country, but related government policies are mostly in line with corresponding EU policies. The development of Europe's cultural and creative industries is perhaps the strongest incentive to implement more coherent skills development and arts-based education practices.

Conclusions

There are strong linkages between policies and their funding instruments. EU education policies are primarily concerned with cooperation between member states and the development of particular skills, and less with guidelines for the actual integration of arts in education systems, which is being applied differently in each member state, even when national policies also point at synergies between policies concerned with the development of creative skills and their implications for social inclusion. At the level of school curricula, arts-based education is closely linked to collaborative and active learning pedagogies, which, despite an extensive body of literature and research, have hardly been explicitly translated into EU and national policies so far.

Methodology

Existing and potential synergies for arts-based policies have been identified by comparing policies in the areas of economic development, social inclusion, technology, cultural literacy, and education. Publicly accessible policy documents have been examined with regard to synergies in terms of policies, programmes, practices and funding that are relevant for the development of children and young people. Examples of national policies within the EU have been compared with each other and with national and regional experiences elsewhere. Some of the prevailing literature on active learning, inclusive education, skills development, cultural literacy and social cohesion in the context of arts-based education has been consulted as well.

References

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Kemal Ahson, *D2.5 Report on policy synergies for arts-based education across Europe*. UH, Helsinki, 2025.

Policy Takeaways

Enhancing synergies and capitalising on links between policies depend on their practical implementation. Therefore, guidelines on the implementation of arts-based education have to be more explicit on its purpose of developing creative and social skills.

In view of changing skills needs, and in order to actually contribute to intercultural dialogue, creativity, critical thinking and innovation, more time has to be allocated to arts-based education in national curricula for primary, secondary and vocational education.

The cultural and creative industries have extensive knowledge in creative skills development. It can be harnessed more systematically by policymakers and education systems in public-private partnerships aimed at filling the current skills gap.

To increase their impact, funding programmes need to be more conditional on the actual implementation and results of connected policies.

The Cultural Literacies' Value in Europe (CLiViE) project develops and applies a Theory of Change (ToC) methodology and Social Return on Investment (SROI) framework to increase our understanding of the value of cultural literacy through arts-based education on social cohesion.

CLiViE
Cultural Literacies' Value in Europe

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