

## 5. INFORMAL EDUCATION FOR THE YOUNG ADULTS BY VISUAL ARTS

Smaranda - Sabina Moldovan,<sup>224</sup>  
Ioana Palamar<sup>225</sup>

**Abstract:** *The present paper aims to explore and search in the particularities of the informal educational system mainly developed through Erasmus programme and funding. The methodology is a wide one based on artistic research, experiment and dialogical groups. We hope to bring new forms of informal education that can be applied to a large group of young adults, in an online system with application in the physical environment of each area.*

**Key words:** *Erasmus, collaboration, art activity, workshop, exhibition*

### 1. Introduction

The cultural and creative sector has been particularly hard hit by the pandemic crisis. After two years of lockdowns in different countries the cultural and creative sector is still struggling. When it comes to their education and participation in the creative and cultural sectors, isolated youth face unique challenges. Lacking social interaction and support can lead to loneliness, isolation, and even depression, which can negatively impact their academic performance and their ability to engage in creative activities.

One of the impacts on informal education will consist in the ability of equipping young people and adults with the necessary tools and competencies to find creative and innovative solutions to unprecedented risks and societal challenges, as well as to identify opportunities that can be sought in a critical context. By developing skills and competences that enhance creativity, the research projects aim to improve the quality, innovation and recognition of youth work. Accessible tools and practical examples need to be developed to help those who need to answer the question: "How can culture and arts help people and places better face the new challenges of pandemic disease, climate change, globalisation, demographic change and technological advances ?"

### 2. Discussions

The artistic approach in education, if we talk about art based research or action research or 'a/r/tography' is related to the nature of art and its transformations. Art has transformed, the changing process is everywhere in art, whether you think of the process in physical terms, like turning the clay into a ceramic object or conceptual term, where the invisible receives shape. The transformation mostly works both ways, from form to idea and from idea to form. Events outside art such as new technological developments procedures alternative approaches on the art subject.

But not only the discovery of iron or glass, or any other material influenced the arts, but also social events. Our latest social, economic, political major event that

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<sup>224</sup> Assistant PhD., West University, Timișoara, România, email: smaranda.moldovan@e-uvt.ro, ID ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9161-2234>

<sup>225</sup> Lecturer PhD., "George Enescu" National University of Arts, Iași, România, email: ioanapalamar@yahoo.com; ID ORCID <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-4025-1188>

had a huge impact on everything in our lives was the Pandemic Lockdown. During the 2020-2023 new events modulated themselves to be part of the art scene education and as soon as the situation permitted they regained their status and the artistic activity went back to normal with minor changes in the concept such as the "George Enescu" University of Arts Iași *Art Residency*. It is an artistic residency program taking place in Iași, which invites yearly international visual artists in order to develop an artistic project inspired by their experiences within the local cultural context.

The program aims to facilitate the interaction between students from the Faculty of Visual Arts and Design at the "George Enescu" University of Arts in Iași and the invited artists, promoting the exchange of artistic experiences. This article will briefly present the work of British artist of Greek origin Christoforos Botsis, carried out in Iași during November 2023. That being said, we can state that the artistic residences are now more focused on the local context and transcultural education.

### **3. Research and methodology**

The main methodologies we have used are action-based research and arts-based art research. Arts-based action research uses art in a variety of ways for inquiry, intervention, knowledge production and/or information exchange. Artistically based research is a mode of formal qualitative inquiry which uses artistic processes to understand and articulate subjective human experience. It was later further defined as the type of research that uses arts, broadly defined, to examine, understand, represent, and even interrogate human action and experience. It is a way of transforming information and the relation of art, research and theory to inform the public on various issues.

Methods such as: keeping a research diary, document collection and analysis, participant observation, questionnaire surveys, structured and unstructured interviews, and case studies have emerged from the general research methodology (generally referred to as the qualitative research paradigm). In our article, some study cases from the *Erasmus* projects of the *West University of Timisoara* and the *George Enescu* National University of Arts, Iasi, both from Painting Departments, Romania will be introduced. These are:

#### **Study case: "George Enescu" University of Arts Iași Art Residency program**

"George Enescu" University of Arts Iași *Art Residency* program aims to foster connections between diverse cultures by organizing activities specific to the artistic formal education sector, including: curating, workshops, exhibitions and artist talks. This international cultural initiative primarily targets students from the Painting department at the Faculty of Visual Arts and Design at the *George Enescu* National University of Arts. Our students are encouraged to engage with the international artist residents who are graduates of prestigious art institutions and emerging artists with valuable experience.

This interaction benefits both parties: students gain insights into different cultural systems and artistic practices, while invited artists immerse themselves in the unique Eastern European cultural landscape. In November 2023, Christoforos Botsis participated in the art residency program after applying in 2022. He developed a project titled *Átopos* which was exhibited at *Aparte* Art Gallery, part of

the Faculty of Visual Arts and Design in Iași. Ana Stoica, a volunteer student from our university, assisted him with the organization and curation of the event.

### **Átopos solo exhibition, Artist-in-residence Christophoros Botsis**

Building on the mixed media approach Christophoros Botsis utilized in previous residencies—at *KuBain* Germany in 2022 and at the *Old School Residency* in Bulgaria in 2019—he delved into themes of emotional ineffability, dislocation, alienation, and fragmentation. He worked across multiple mediums simultaneously, producing experimental cut-out drawings, monotype etchings, and paintings, with the intention of crafting a collage-installation. According to the artist, fragmentation is a crucial theme for understanding and experiencing the exhibited works. This concept is conveyed through paper cut-outs that create mismatched elements, resulting in a collision of disparate components. Each element exists in relation to the others, with their boundaries being actively defined. Within a painting or drawing, as well as across the artworks themselves, each piece is characterized by its differences from all others. They exist in conflict yet are interdependent.



Fig. no. 1 and 2 Christophoros Botsis (Greece), solo exhibition *Átopos*, *Aparte* Gallery, Faculty of Visual Arts and Design, *George Enescu* National University of Arts, Iași, *U.N.A.G.E. Iași Art Residency* Program, 29.11.2023, poster designed by Assistant PhD. Andrei Alecsandru Pantea

The foundation of *Átopos* was drawing, serving as the link between the various mediums Christophoros explored. He used instinctive and spontaneous drawing as a method of visual research to guide his thought processes, yet certain visual themes consistently appear: fragmented faces, contorted limbs, and sprawling abstract compositions that can be perceived from multiple angles. This approach is reflected in all the other mediums he engaged with during the residency. The artist is on a journey to discover his identity, engaging in a cultural immersion process that allows him to gain a deeper understanding of himself through others, who serve as his mirror. By directly interacting with different cultures, he gains new perspectives that help him reassess and redefine his true identity.

### ***Grasping the future - Erasmus + project***

It was proposed to identify the needs of the beneficiaries through a short survey as a first step to develop a strategy for the project. The aim of the survey is to identify the needs of young people in the online space, a growing alternative to the physical space in education due to a general shutdown in Romania since March 2020. It is also an investigation of the relationship between young people and local operators in the creation sector. The young generation is forced to adapt to a new

environment in a short period of time, in terms of educational cycles, due to the severe shutdown. At the same time, the creative sector, together with other sectors, has begun to lose out. For many artists, the closure of galleries has meant the loss of several sources of income.

However, the creative sector did not switch to online versions in the first phase. During the pandemic years, an online network of events was in place. Consumers of creative products also began to be present online, which will increase in the pandemic months of 2020 and 2021, leading to an increase in cultural events in the online environment. Based on the questions of the 1st Transnational Meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark, we developed a five-question survey.

Transnational meeting that took place in Copenhagen, Denmark. Application used: forms.app: Online form builder | Free online survey tool. Link for results : [my.forms.app/report/615fe30c8cfd170c985feb8c](https://my.forms.app/report/615fe30c8cfd170c985feb8c). Participants: 328 students from: Faculty of Arts and Design, Faculty of Literature and History, Faculty of Music and Theatre. Questions were rated from 1 to 5 (1 was considered as total disagreement, 3 as impartiality and 5 total agreement). Feedback section at the end of the survey.

As a result of the survey we can conclude that there is confusion among young people about the benefits of using online tools, according to the survey results presented. Positive aspects include being encouraged to volunteer in different organisations. Dialogue should be facilitated between young people and cultural and creative industries players. A less positive aspect highlighted in the survey is that more cultural events need to be promoted. The results of the project were published under the book *Grasping the Future* and the e-learning platform for informal education <https://cultureplan-youth.eu/>.

### **3. Conclusions**

Both Erasmus+ programs *Grasping the future* and *U.N.A.G.E. Iași Art Residency* complement each other by giving to young adults the opportunities to grow alternatives to the physical space where they can learn various practices in the visual arts field. Their aim consists of healing the young adults of the traumatic pandemic experience, by offering them solutions to gradually go back to their previous way of learning which will also integrate the digital learning acquired during the lockdown period.

For example, the residency program offered artist Christoforos Botsis a safe and inspiring environment for his creative work, allowing him to focus uninterrupted on his artistic pursuits. He feels that his time in the residency positively influenced his artistic direction and provided valuable opportunities for a physical cultural exchange. Excited by the potential of this residency, he was eager to engage with the communities in Iași and the Moldavian region. At the same time, our volunteer student Ana Stoica who collaborated with him during his residency stay and also helped with the curating of his show, had the chance to explore new artistic approaches and gain a clearer understanding of the insight of an art exhibition logistically speaking.

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