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ABSTRACT

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Arts for Social Transformation in Latin America: From Tolerance to Respect

Latin American arts movement for social transformation could be an opportunity to discuss the reality of otherness and a pedagogy of the difference as a post colonial way to escape the reverberation of dominance in our conception of diversity.

Latin America has a widely spread net of arts & cultural initiatives from grassroots organizations working in 17 countries around arts education and production as well as distribution of artistic and non for profit cultural goods. This none border artistic movement is joined to local development and democratic processes giving birth to a new way of understanding arts for wellbeing.

Cultural centers, public libraries, hip – hop groups, street arts in general, music, video, community theater groups, social circus, community radios, and other popular communication experiences are part of this “off scene” community circuits.

Along the last decade, Art for Social Transformation experience has expanded and given birth to a net of community initiatives which show some basic common features:

- deeply – rooted art creations attached to territories.
- arts for public and outdoor spaces.
- arts linked to social inclusion, social economies and cultural rights.
- youth leadership.
- ideals based on intercultural life for peace and participatory democracy.
- arts for racial and cultural fusion.
- Call for public artistic interventions in social and citizen movements specially in vulnerable contexts.
- New ways in teaching and learning for formal schools.

Since 2004 a small group of artists working from social organizations coming from different places in Central and South America started to get together. It is an artist movement expressing forms of social transformation, more of a lively fellowship cultural activism than a purely aesthetic artistic movement. After a series of know-how exchanges, in 2009 the movement recognized the Brazilian Pontos de Cultura Political Policy and Medellín’s social urbanism through culture and education as models to be introduced in our region.

Actually more than a thousand organizations are part of a continental campaign - “Community Living Cultures” -aiming to achieve 0,1% of national budgets for community art programs. Between 2009 and 2016, this goal allowed to accomplish new government programs designed in collaboration with NGOs. At the present time, we are holding annual meetings which bring together artist networks and both national and local government representatives. These borderless Latin American alliances have brought forth the strongest citizenship learning through the arts environment to repair the structural Latin-American social breakup due to poverty, exclusion and crime.

Which is the problem Community Living Cultures are willing to solve?

Latin American cultural policies – addressed mainly to Fine Arts or folk traditions - tend to lack continuity, direction and local or national coordination. At the most they are reduced to promote “cultural industries”.

The common shortage of public policies to stimulate art in the community becomes evident, except from certain initiatives such as Brazilian Cultural Policies and the city of Medellín.

Proactive social artistry networks urge governments to develop new cultural public policies committed to extend the borders of state responsibilities from the fine arts to community based cultural expressions. In time, this movement will allow to build up citizenship based on affective bonds and friendly environments. Thus, it will bring together individuals and groups in a joint request for bettering democracy.

In this frame, Crear vale la pena develops since 1997 programs on artistic education and artistic production for young people in poverty contexts. We assume that poverty is an economic problem, but isolation as individuals and community damages social condition in a way that transcends material needs. And so, beyond providing art education per se, CVLP increasingly focuses on art as a process of social inclusion and a means to build a sense of -worth, and socially valued identity. Again, poverty undermines individuals, but art can convey the meaning of life and act as a social driver.

As a way of scaling –up this local initiative since 2012 Crear develops “AWC: Art, Welfare and Creativity in Communities” as an arts for social transformation platform involving artist, teachers, social workers, coming from civil society and governmental agents. This program developed for the cities of Buenos Aires and Azul is aimed to renew teaching and learning activities, merging art and creativity across the curriculum, so as to improve educational quality and coexistence at school. It is carried out as a public-private consortium that explores new cultural and educational policies, articulating a joint action of social organizations, public authorities and academic members.

We had an encouraging outcome : 91% high school students pointed out classes were more interesting and motivating. 100% teachers (initial, primary, high school) perceive a positive contribution to their pupils learning, 71% high school students state that AWC classes help their team works and thinking. 97% teachers (initial , primary, high school) believe AWC implementation improves pupils living together and 91% teachers state that artists contributed with new teaching tools.

Both the original grass route experience in a small cultural center and the much broader initiative of arts education inside 20 public schools corroborate that art is **a powerful tool for social transformation, bonding inside communities and a renewal in teaching and learning for new institutional formats inside education.**