

Collaborations in migration societies: a minds-on assignment

Thinking gallery education as collaboration with publics rather than or in addition to developing programs for the general public or specific target groups is a thought that structures the practice of many critical gallery educators. How can gallery education make cultural institutions usable for collaborative, anti-racist learning processes in migration societies? How can such collaborations be established? Based on a text by Rubia Salgado, this chapter proposes questions to discuss interests, benefits, decision making, power structures and representation at the start of a collaborative project.

Concerned with the aim of this workbook to connect theory and readings in the field of art and especially gallery education with strategies for pedagogical practice, I have spent quite some time thinking about texts which have influenced my practice and reflexion in gallery education. The one that I have probably recalled most times in the past year is a text by Rubia Salgado, entitled "Collaboration: when migrants set the conditions"¹. Rubia Salgado is responsible for the area of cultural work at *maiz*, the autonomous center for and by migrant women in Linz, Austria. In the text which was published in a volume on building alliances between art and anti-racism, she analyses the center's experiences in co-operations with the

art field and explains the criteria *maiz* developed for such collaborative practice.

So, I want to briefly expose its arguments since they might be as useful as a "minds-on assignment" for educators interested in gallery education as a collaborative, anti-racist practice in migration society² as they were for me.

Salgado critiques the multicultural approach and the concept of participation in a growing number of artistic projects concerned with the issue of migration. Many of those projects, she states, reaffirm a racist discourse by focusing on a culturally defined "other" which is offered to be "known" through the artistic work, thereby reducing migrants to objects. A main point in her critique is concerned with the repartition of roles and responsibilities in projects defined as participatory: the artists' role is to develop concepts and organise the project, and "the inclusion of migrants is one point in their to-do-lists"³.

In opposition to the "borrowing of the keyword participation from politically correct vocabulary"⁴ due to reasons of legitimation, *collaborative* projects between migrant and "majority" actors for Salgado are defined by an endeavour for symmetry in the relationship and egalitarian forms of working together. For *maiz*, collaborating with the art field is a strategy. These collaborations are possibilities to research on social and political fields as well as to expose counter-hegemonial positions related to them publicly. A special value of working with art for Salgado lies in a participatory work between reality and fiction: more than just producing descriptions and denunciations of realities, for the participating migrants it can offer a space to invent perspectives and "changed" realities. In a time when migrants are more and more defined as a "target group" of educational work at cultural institutions, the necessity to do "intercultural" projects is brought forward as a requirement for funding, and many educators think about the exclusion mechanisms of art institutions and strive to work against them, the critique Salgado exposes concerning artists' projects also seems highly relevant for education practice in museums and cultural institutions.

Thinking gallery education as collaboration with publics rather than or in addition to developing programs for the general public or specific target groups is a thought that structures the practice of many critical gallery educators. *Microsilons* for instance, an artists/educators collective based in Geneva, works with small groups on long term collaborative projects, stating that this way of working can “open a space to think about new ways for citizens to interact with institutions and society in general”⁵. For the educator and researcher Javier Rodrigo working collaboratively with “already established groups or collectives”⁶, taking cultural institutions and their structures as a “working material” is a way to develop new possibilities for action in “intermediate zones”, to establish new structures for collective cultural production. How can gallery education make cultural institutions usable for collaborative, anti-racist learning processes in migration societies? How can such collaborations be established?

In my thinking about those questions and reflection on practice the criteria that maiz has set for working with the art field have been challenging and helpful. For collaborations to be able to realize the perspectives that maiz connects with strategic work in cultural production, Salgado states, a series of conditions must be fulfilled:

- Maiz does not cooperate with people who approach them with complete project concepts, that is where the form and extent of participation of migrants is already defined. Instead, collaboration partners must be interested in a dialogical process outside of a “victimising” logic and critical of eurocentrism. A necessity for projects to be successful is a certain agreement concerning the motivation and the goals of the project - on the political perspectives of cultural work.
- Additionally, as Salgado explains, it is necessary that projects strive for egalitarian forms of collaboration, but knowing about their impossibilities, as the relations in cooperations between “majority” actors and migrants are necessarily marked by inequalities. For a joint search for strategies, agreements and structures to fight racism and sexism, reflection on the conflict lines which structure the collaborative practice (along the lines minority/majority, eurocentric knowledge/periphery knowledge, art field/political field, etc.) must be an essential part of the project and should be realized throughout all project phases.
- Maiz further intends not to restrict these negotiations and questions to an internal process, but to make the reflections on forms of collabora-

tion, the definitions of each participant’s role, on positions in society and power relations as constitutive for the working process in the project accessible to audiences.

Now, what could it mean to part from these criteria in gallery education projects? How to initiate a dialogical, reflective process striving towards symmetry in collaboration within or at the frontiers of cultural institutions? The next page proposes questions for an initial meeting for a collaboration project. They might be helpful to discuss interests, benefits, decision making, power structures and representation transparently at the start of a collaborative project and to design a structure for ongoing process reflection.

QUESTIONS

Invite the group you want to collaborate with to do a project together. If an interest in joint work is shared, organize a meeting. Discuss your project ideas and the group's expectations along the questions proposed below. It might be helpful for the discussion if you write down your ideas as a starting point to be questioned, debated and re-written in the discussion. Not all questions can be solved at the first meeting – plan a structure for thinking about them in the working process.

WHO BENEFITS FROM THE COLLABORATION IN WHICH WAYS?

WHICH POWER RELATIONS FRAME THE JOINT WORK?

WHICH MOTIVATIONS DO THE PARTNERS/PARTICIPANTS HAVE TO DO SUCH A PROJECT? WHAT ARE THE INTERESTS IMPLIED (your own, the institutions', the funder's, the participants',...)

WHO BRINGS WHICH KIND OF KNOWLEDGE INTO THE PROJECT?

WHO WILL TAKE DECISIONS CONCERNING ACTIVITIES, PROCESS AND RESOURCES (BUDGET)?

WHO DOCUMENTS THE WORK? WHOSE VIEW WILL STRUCTURE THE PROJECT'S REPRESENTATION?

HOW CAN A STRUCTURE BE BUILT WHICH FOSTERS REFLEXION ON THE ABOVE MENTIONED QUESTIONS DURING THE WHOLE DURATION OF THE PROJECT ?

IF YOU THINK THIS CHAPTER WAS WAY TO SHORT FOR THOSE COMPLEX ISSUES, THIS MIGHT BE INTERESTING FOR YOU:

Salgado, Rubia: *Zusammenarbeit: wenn Migrantinnen Voraussetzungen nennen.* In: *Allianzenbildung zwischen Kunst und Antirassismuserbeit: Annäherungen, Überschneidungen, Strategien, Reflexion.* Ed. Ljubomir Bratic, Daniela Koweindl, Ula Schneider. Wien: Soho in Ottakring, 2004, p. 10-13 (in german).

Castro Varela, Maria do Mar and Nikita Dhawan: *Breaking the Rules. Education and Post-Colonialism.* In: *documenta 12 education. Between Critical practice and Visitor Services. Results of a Research Project.* Ed. Carmen Mörsch and the research team of documenta 12 education. Zurich/Berlin: diaphanes, 2009, p. 317-332.

Lynch, Bernadette: *If the Museum is the Gateway, who is the Gatekeeper?* Engage 11, 2002.

Project "Atelier", a collaboration between the Institute for Art Education, ZhdK, Zurich autonomous school/ association "Education for All" and Zurich Design Museum. <http://iae.zhdk.ch/iae/deutsch/forschung/laufende-forschungsprojekte/kunstvermittlung-in-transformation/atelier-in-kooperation-mit-dem-verein-bildung-fuer-alle/> (in german)

Sternfeld, Nora: *Der Taxispielstrick. Vermittlung zwischen Selbstregulierung und Selbstermächtigung.* In: Jaschke, Beatrice, Charlotte Martinz-Turek und Nora Sternfeld (Hg.): *Wer spricht? Autorität und Autorschaft in Ausstellungen.* Wien: Turia und Kant, 2005 (in german)

Project "Tate Encounters", <http://process.tateencounters.org/>

Mecheril, Paul et al: *Migrationspädagogik.* Bachelor/Master. Weinheim/Basel: Beltz, 2010 (in german)

Rodrigo Montero, Javier: *Educational tendencies: Discursos y líneas de tensión entre las políticas culturales y las educativas.* YPPRODUCTIONS library, http://www.ypsite.net/recursos/biblioteca/documentos/educational_javier_rodrigo.pdf (in spanish)

NOTES

1—Salgado, Rubia: *Zusammenarbeit: wenn Migrantinnen Voraussetzungen nennen.* In: *Allianzenbildung zwischen Kunst und Antirassismuserbeit: Annäherungen, Überschneidungen, Strategien, Reflexion.* Ed. Ljubomir Bratic, Daniela Koweindl, Ula Schneider. Wien: Soho in Ottakring, 2004, p. 10-13 (in german).

2—The term "migration society" is used to indicate that social reality is affected by migration, see Mecheril, Paul et al: *Migrationspädagogik.* Bachelor/Master. Weinheim/Basel: Beltz, 2010, p. 11.

3—Ebd, p.12.

4—P.12.

5—Microsillons: *Autonomy within the institution : towards a critical art education.* *Art Education Research*, 1 (2), 2010. <http://iae-journal.zhdk.ch/>

6—<http://another-roadmap.zhdk.ch/2010/11/15/barcelona-spain/>