



ICUMEDA Intercultural Mediation & Art Setting the Stage for Upskilling Pathways in Afghanistan

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Abstract

ICUMEDA Intercultural Mediation & Art has been a tool for academic mediation since September 2015 when it got state-registered with the Austrian Ministry of Justice.

ICUMEDA has especially focussed on strengthening the efforts of local communities for educational and cultural events in Afghanistan. It has done so by means of so-called new mediative art: art setting the stage for the awareness of future educational possibilities, for upskilling pathways as well as trauma(-informed) pedagogy. It was first presented in South Asia's first cultural capital Bamiyan and later also performed in the Afghan province of Daykundi.

This type of mediation was first introduced in the German-language expert magazine PERSPEKTIVE MEDIATION in 2016, the following year the concept of new mediative art was covered in a guest commentary in the Austrian WIENER ZEITUNG. In 2018 the positive results in terms of tolerance and education of this unique combination of academic mediation with art were presented at a symposium of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs in Germany.

Keywords: *Academic Mediation, Trauma Pedagogy, new mediative art, upskilling pathways*

The history of higher education: A joint success story with intercultural academic mediation

A brief glance at European history makes plainly visible how mediation and intercultural cooperation are intrinsically linked to – and in actuality functioning as very gatekeeper for – upskilling pathways often leading to higher education as well as the quality enhancement of university studies.

It is a great pleasure for me to highlight this subject on occasion of this international conference which takes place in the core of Italy – the very country that has coined educational history in Europe in such an unparalleled way.

According to some historians, Europe's oldest university – or prototype of university – was the Schola Medica Salernitana [1] [2]. There is testimony for the high reputation of this Medical School of **Salerno** dating back even to the tenth century [3]. Its vivid legend has it that this prototype of university came into existence by starting a systematic study *procedere* based on the intercultural cooperation of scholars of various backgrounds: Greek Pontus, Latin Salernus, Jewish Helinus and Arab Abdela [2]. In the eleventh century, the Salernitan medical Alphanus realized the importance of tapping into the potential of Arab medical knowlegde. This new awareness resulted in having the polyglot language mediator Constantinus Africanus assigned to translate this plethora of Oriental expertise into the working language of the medical doctors of the Schola Medica Salernitana [3].

Regarding Academic Mediation and the relevance of cooperation between universities, **Bologna** set the stage for supranational agreements on higher education on a European level. On June 19th, 1999, one year after the 800th anniversary of the Università di Bologna, the Bologna declaration paved the way for Europe's enhancement of its intellectual, cultural, social as well as scientific and technological heritage and dimensions [4]. This was one outstanding example of the many directional agreements for cross-cultural and -national educational cooperation in the younger history of Europe.

Florence as international magnet for the artistically-inclined was home to a very intriguing chapter of history too, which, albeit from a simple grass-root point of view, may be assessed as groundwork for intercultural mediation in its intrinsic unwarlike, tolerant aspect. The courage of a small group of elderly expat ladies living in Florence in the 1930s impressed Franco Zeffirelli so much that he featured them in his 1999 film that is based on his own childhood [5].

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Professional Mediation itself has been described as creative art as it aims at emotional training and strengthening emotional intelligence in order to open doors for non-violent ways of addressing challenges [6]. Education is the key, tapping into yet unfamiliar resources of other cultures precedes academic mediation which itself cultivates both intellectual exchange and intercultural art.

The history of ICUMEDA Intercultural Mediation & Art

The idea for combining academic mediation with art was born in the imagination of a devout excursionist while being on the road to foreign lands on six continents. It was easy to see the need for intercultural mediation on an academic level whenever isolated destinations were reached, destinations that seemed to be so cut-off from the rest of the world with all its opportunities in terms of educational, cultural and artistic pathways. On the way from India to Iran in 2007, a short encounter with Afghanistan (as well as journeys to other parts of Asia and Africa in the years later) did have a crucial impact so as to work on building a framework fit for intercultural mediation even in the traumatic context of war and flight.

This idea was finally implemented into the framework of the university study of Academic Mediation and Trauma Pedagogy at Vienna's Sigmund Freud PrivatUniversität, and put into practice by registering trilingual ICUMEDA Intercultural Mediation & Art with the Austrian Ministry of Justice in September 2015, activity bases Austria and Afghanistan [7].

Spectrum of activities of ICUMEDA Intercultural Mediation & Art

Ever since its registration, on the base of this unique mediation I have been available for trilingual assignments – German, English, Persian – of various kinds in order to meet current needs related to this field: they include pedagogy and cross-cultural consultation, classroom mediation within Social Learning teaching units, keynote lectures as well as university lectureships on Conflict Management in Austria and Afghanistan (in respected order: ÖZPGS Austrian Association for psychological Prevention of Violence, Federal School Inspectorate Tyrol, Austria, ÖBM Austrian Federal Association of Mediation, Sigmund Freud PrivatUniversität Vienna and Linz, Austria, Universities Bamian and Daykundi, Afghanistan).

Image 1¹



Image 2²



In an article in the mediation expert journal PERSPEKTIVE MEDIATION in 2016 featuring a field report on ICUMEDA activities in the trauma context of war and flight, a new German term of mediation expertise was introduced to cover the whole range of needed tasks as mediator: Ur-Mediation [8]. Additionally to the tasks linked to classical mediation, this term allowed to incorporate needed tasks to be accomplished in the field of intercultural mediation which encounters deeply entrenched structural conflicts blocking the way to educational upskilling pathways. For example, due to traumatic experiences one may not feel comfortable consulting a classic mediation session because of a lack of self-confidence when taking to a foreign mediator. Yet this individual may feel comfortable enough to attend a performance art installation (new mediative art) [9] conveying the range of emotions left unuttered through an unobtrusive yet thought-provoking art display. This newly paved pathway towards self-trust, confidence and mutual understanding may then lead to a classic mediation setting where, usually within the circle of family or teachers and professors plus a neutral mediator in their

¹ Afghanistan 30.11.2015, on the way to the Ministry of Information and Culture of Panjshir

² Austria 27.06.2016, on the way to an appointment in Tyrol as pedagogue for ÖZPGS, Austrian Association for the Prevention of Violence (buses in 1 and 2 were not the means of transport)



midst, resources for continued gain of education are discovered.

Another special need that Ur-Mediation meets is linked to cultural misunderstandings due to limited information resources in a war country like Afghanistan. Such a need became clear after having published a guest commentary for the Wiener Zeitung about the distribution of Adolf Hitler's book „Mein Kampf“ in Asia [10]. Unlike other neighboring countries, in Afghanistan's main book stores at the time of mediative research literature related to the study field of trauma pedagogy (like books from Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl) couldn't be found – unfortunately, quite contrary to Hitler's „Kampf“. Being a mediator of Austrian background a duty to address this historically difficult topic at educational institutions evolved – within the academic framework of Ur-Mediation a master research project on this subject was launched, its publication is scheduled by end of this year. Beginning with 2020, selected awareness activities are being scheduled to face another culturally delicate topic: sanitation. Ur-Mediation again will be a tool for addressing this road block on upskilling pathways as no achieved progress can last without proper sanitation facilities, history plainly shows.

Last year, in 2018, at the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs in the German city of Weimar an aspect of Ur-Mediation was further highlighted during a presentation introducing the ICUMEDA range of mediation activities [11]. A summary was provided as to how new mediative art within the academic framework of Ur-Mediation successfully used its potential for opening intercultural communication and how this in effect resulted in a more systematic way of academic cooperation leading to upskilling pathways. Its furtherance in terms of education was pointed out in a brief introduction of scheduled blended lecturing units for two universities in Afghanistan. These units constitute an academic symposium held for universities in Bamiyan and Daykundi that started the same week as the lectureship for Conflict Management at the Sigmund Freud PrivatUniversität in Vienna and Linz, Austria, at the winter term 2018/19. The certification ceremony of the participants of the first part of the symposium, university professors of the respected universities, is scheduled for the end of summer this year in Afghanistan.

Image 3¹



Image 4²



Academic Symposium TRAUMA PEDAGOGY AND ACADEMIC MEDIATION IN THE FIELD OF INDIVIDUAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT
by David Th. Auerhammer, جامعة العلوم الإسلامية الدولية International Mediation & A.C. Lecturer at Sigmund Freud University WIG 2018: 19 Conflict Management
Mediated lecturing: online digital-media lecturing combined with traditional lecturing methods at the university venue.
photo credit with kind permission of Bamiyan University, Afghanistan, N.Z. Faza

Art setting the stage for the future of education that faces special needs

The above mentioned article in PERSPEKTIVE MEDIATION in 2016 pointed out that it is the impetus given through love for art that plays the major role in choosing the venue of an intercultural mediation base of this kind [8]. Unsurprisingly, the effort to engage in this kind of academic mediation work along with trauma(-informed) pedagogy simultaneously incited a creative way of mediating

¹ Austria, Sigmund Freud PrivatUniversität Linz, 20.01.2019

Day 4 of lectureship on Conflict Management: students experiment on depicting the difference between crisis and conflict in posing art building blocks while new mediative art is being displayed in the background (borderline | the walk on the edge)

²Afghanistan, University Bamiyan, 02.12.2018

Lecture 2 of the Academic Symposium Trauma Pedagogy and Academic Mediation in the field of individual Conflict Management, held by means of blended lecturing



between the mind's eye and the world perceived by the others. Indeed, the artistic synchronicity of what is going on around the mediator did find a label after all: new mediative art [9].

While three art projects have been performed so far, it was BORDERLINE | THE WALK ON THE EDGE, premiered in summer 2016 at South Asia's 1. SAARC Cultural Capital Bamiyan, Afghanistan [9], that set new stages for intercultural cooperation and understanding [11]. It opened the way for profound academic meditation and, three years later, opened upskilling pathways for university professors by means of the above mentioned academic symposium held through blended lecturing.

Another new mediative art exhibition was premiered, again in Bamiyan, in 2018. BEAUTIFUL YOU ARE revealed art pieces in picture and short film collected on a world travel [12] [13], in tribute to the mediative artist's profile David, the Traveller (Davoud Safary). Afghan visitors were able to see themselves walk in other people's shoes – or sandals! – and showed high appreciation for this both intercultural and educational experience fostering resilience.

Image 5¹



¹First SAARC Cultural Capital in South Asia, Bamiyan, Afghanistan: BORDERLINE exhibition and display premiered on 04.-06.08.2016 with K. Dadras, Director of the Ministry of Information and Culture (3rd from left)

Image 6²



²Bamiyan, Afghanistan, 18.08.2018: opening of the BEAUTIFUL YOU ARE exhibition with A.H. Ahmadpoor, Director of the Ministry of Information and Culture of Bamiyan (3rd from left)

Bottom line

Facing special needs in the educational sector, like mediating and lecturing in the context of war and flight, is a challenge to be met in accordance to the current knowledge of trauma pedagogy and



trauma-informed pedagogy. Some ideas in this special category might be found in the story of this unique combination of state-registered mediation with new mediative art realized by ICUMEDA Intercultural Mediation & Art [7]. In any event, taking on diverse challenges of this nature proves to be momentous – as this is where the very groundwork for the future of education is being laid.

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