



## Interdisciplinary Art Education in Serbia – Bridging the Gap. Case Study: University of Arts in Belgrade

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### 1. Introduction – Recognising the Importance of Interdisciplinary Education

*Disciplinary or interdisciplinarity, that is (not) the question.*

It is evident that pure *mono-disciplinarity* in arts and sciences does not exist; however, academics are accustomed to classifying knowledge into specific and separate disciplines.

Consequently, since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the increasing number of both individual researchers and universities has supported the interdisciplinary discourse, contributing to the necessary deconstruction of disciplinary boundaries, i.e. *restructuration of knowledge*.

Perceived as a cross-boundary interaction of two or more disciplines, interdisciplinarity ranges from a simple communication of ideas to the mutual integration of methodology, epistemology, terminology etc. [1].

Therefore, if we assume that important dimensions of human knowledge "lie unexplored in the spaces between those boundaries or the places where they cross, overlap, divide, or dissolve" [2], interdisciplinary education transpires as crucial for the overall advancement of knowledge. It is essential in order to address broad issues, see multiple perspectives, answer complex questions and solve problems that cannot be fully argued by a single discipline.

Even though interdisciplinary education is occasionally criticised by the sceptical disciplinary colleagues for not being *disciplined*, it is increasingly described as a new stage in the evolution of science [3].

### 2. Case Study: University of Arts in Belgrade

University of Arts in Belgrade (UAB) was founded in 1957 and it consists of four art schools: *Faculty of Music, Faculty of Fine Arts, Faculty of Drama and Faculty of Applied Arts* [4]. It is not only the oldest and the largest institution of higher art education in Serbia, but it is also the only Serbian university entirely devoted to the arts.

By offering a wide range of study programmes that combine art practice and theoretical research for more than fifty years, the UAB has significantly contributed to cultural development of the whole region (particularly the former Yugoslav republics).

However, the biggest disadvantage of the UAB lies in the fact that the faculties are monolithically dispersed into several distant locations throughout the city, disabling professors and students to communicate, collaborate and share ideas, knowledge and experience. Even students and professors from different departments of the same faculty are not motivated enough to cooperate with each other due to the fostered individual teaching practice (extremely important to artists).

Therefore, comprised by the set of departments with relatively distinctive areas of interest, four UAB faculties are *vocational schools* [5] that symbolise the traditional disciplinary discourse.

#### 2.1. Bridging the Gap in Art Education – Between Art Practice, Management and Theory (Research)

Due to the complexity of the phenomenon, it is very difficult to explore the arts within the disciplinary boundaries, especially considering the changes which postmodern and poststructuralist tendencies and theories brought into life. Besides, the local and global socio-cultural contexts had their own impact on the curriculum development.

The democratic political changes that occurred in Serbia in 2000 were a turning point for the return of the country to the mainstream of both European integration and the Bologna processes. The main goals regarding the higher art education were to introduce new contents, establish Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degrees, system of credits such as the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), as well as the recognition of diplomas, promotion of mobility etc. [6].

In order to bridge the gap between the real and the ideal, the *Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies* at the UAB was established in 2001. Beyond the scope of any single discipline, five interdisciplinary study domains were formed (*Cultural Policy and Management, Polymedia Arts, Digital Arts, Scene Design and Theory of Arts and Media*), employing the faculty from disciplinary departments. Situated at the Rectorate of the UAB, in the core centre of the city, interdisciplinary study programmes were (and still are) easily accessible to students from all four member-faculties.

By introducing the latest trends in art practice and theory, interdisciplinary studies (IS) strengthened the cooperation between the faculties. Moreover, new courses responded to the needs of the globalised market which increasingly sought artists and cultural workers with diversified skills and knowledge.

Following the contemporary tendencies, the IS were implemented in accordance with the ECTS. Various teaching methods with the emphasis on problem-based and practice-based learning were applied (lectures, seminars, workshops, group and individual projects).



In addition, the new teaching and learning strategies required the organisational change and the capacity building of the UAB. It was extremely important to replace the traditional *institutional logic* with the *organisational* one, characterised by the development-strategic planning [7].

At the moment, there are six interdisciplinary study programmes offered by the UAB.

*Digital Arts* and *Polymedia Arts* (PhD) go apace with the media / digital technology revolution, encouraging both the artistic practice and theoretical research. In order to fulfil their artistic needs and create unique works of art, students are inspired to go beyond the traditional boundaries, either by combining a broad range of different media or by exploiting the full potential offered by the digital technology.

Scientific studies of *Theory of Arts and Media* (MA & PhD) introduce the contemporary art trends from the international stage to the local academic environment. Students are given the rare opportunity to gain knowledge about the aesthetics, philosophy and theory of art practice and media produced in the late 20<sup>th</sup> / beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. By fostering critical thinking, these study programmes encourage students to develop scientific-theoretical interdisciplinary research at the highest level.

MA study programme *Cultural Policy and Management* (CPM) was established in order to meet the market need for artists skilled in project management and for professional managers able to design and implement radical reforms of cultural institutions. As an interdisciplinary mix of theory and practice, it focuses on cultural policy, management and intercultural theory. Students and professors come not only from the Balkans, but also from other European countries and from across the world, enabling local students to enjoy an international ambience. It is organised in cooperation with the Université Lumière Lyon 2 (France) and taught in English and French (neutral languages). To recognise its role in the promotion of culture and education as areas of mediation, as well as the promotion of intercultural dialogue and international cultural cooperation, the programme received the UNESCO Chair title in 2004.

*Masters in International Performance Research* (MAIPR) Erasmus Mundus study programme is funded by the European Commission and organised in cooperation with the University of Warwick (United Kingdom), the University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands) and the University of Helsinki (Finland). Taught in English, it is aimed at international students who have educational or professional background in performing arts (e.g. artists, curators, actors, directors etc.). The emphasis is on the interdisciplinary combination of present-day performance practice and theory.

## 2.2. Interdisciplinary Art Education and Practice

Being the coordinator of the UNESCO Chair in Cultural Policy and Management (CPM), my intention was to analyse the relationship between students' educational background prior to their enrolment in this master course and their current occupation, in order to better understand the impact of the interdisciplinary studies (IS) on students' employment.

For that reason, former CPM students were surveyed in January 2012. Questions regarding both their previous education and the current occupation were sent by e-mail to 240 former students. The response rate was 57%.

The statistical analysis (table below) demonstrated that the majority of former CPM students originated from other academic disciplines – 72% from humanities (philology, arts, archaeology etc.), only 2% from natural sciences (mathematics, biology) and 1% from engineering and technology (electrical engineering and architecture), while 24% of them studied social sciences (management, journalism, economics etc.) This classification was based on the UNESCO's document *Frascati Manual* [8].

The percentage of students who remained in their home areas after completing this master course is 23.5%, whereas 69.8% transferred to other areas (61.7% moved into the area of cultural policy and management and 8.1% shifted to other fields).

The unemployment rate is considerably low (especially for the transitional country) – 6.7%, which shows that the programme produces an adequate workforce for the actual labour market.

This statistical analysis proves that the interdisciplinary CPM course was crucial for determining students' professional future, therefore, significant for their personal development.

It is particularly important to point out that 71% of former students are currently engaged in the field of cultural policy and management, even though it was the initial area of education to only 13% of them.

The respondents' employment in the field of cultural management and policy varies from those in public cultural institutions (29%), NGOs (22%), international agencies and cultural diplomacy institutions (14%), to freelance managers and curators (13%), public administrators at ministries and city secretariats (8%), employees in the private sector / creative industries (7%) and academics / researchers (6%).

Accordingly, the analysis demonstrates that former CPM students (now local, regional and international experts, cultural policy makers and managers) are the ones reforming institutions and the entire system of culture (particularly in post-socialist societies which are going through social and cultural transition), contributing to the overall professionalization in the field of culture in Serbia, other Balkan and European countries.

## 3. The Outcomes, the Sustainability and the Future of Interdisciplinary Art Education

There are numerous tangible and intangible professional and intellectual outcomes of (the UAB's) interdisciplinary studies. These include curricula development, critical and creative thinking, gained experience, changes in



personal epistemologies, beneficial learning environment, partnerships with other universities, conferences, articles, books, newly equipped classrooms, increased graduates' employability etc.

In terms of sustainability, there are three main areas in which the IS programmes can be recognised:

1. *Institutional sustainability* can be recognised in the existing human resources and study programmes with their own premises and equipment;
2. *Financial sustainability* is provided through students' tuition fees;
3. *Social sustainability* - the IS programmes provided tools for the revitalisation of the university, for the satisfaction of needs of both local community and labour market, what is more, for the transition into a better socio-cultural environment.

The additional fulfilled sustainability requirements are the strong commitment of the teaching staff, high quality of programmes, successful promotion and the adjustment to the market needs.

With the aim to be competitive in the field of higher art education in future, the UAB and IS have to be integrated in all segments of social life. Content and method changes should be included on a regular basis (e.g. new courses, programmes etc.). In order to achieve the ultimate goal and replace the *organisational* management mindset with the *project logic*, the concept of *innovative university* has to be fostered [9]. Active approach, creativity, improvement, participation and international cooperation are the key elements for future success.

Table. Educational background and current occupation structure of former students of the UNESCO Chair in CPM

Educational background	Current occupation						
	Cultural policy actors and cultural managers	Artists	Public administration (national & local level)	Teachers / Professors	Economists, Marketing agents / Other	Unemployed	Total
Humanities (72%)							
Philology	27			6	2	2	37 (27%)
Arts	14	3		7	1		25 (18%)
History of arts	15		3		1	1	20 (15%)
History and Archeology	6						6 (4%)
Other Humanities (Philosophy, Musicology, Cultural Studies)	6				1	3	10 (7%)
Social Sciences (24%)							
Management in Culture and Art Production	13				1	1	15 (11%)
Journalism & Mass Communication	3						3 (2%)
International Relations and Intercultural Communication	3						3 (2%)
Business & Public Administration	2		1				3 (2%)
Ethnology & Anthropology	2						2 (1%)
Other Social Sciences (Psychology, Law & Economics)	2		1		3	1	7 (5%)
Natural Sciences (2%)							
Mathematics, Biology, Geography	2					1	3 (2%)
Engineering and Technology (1%)							
Electrical Engineering & Architecture	2						2 (1%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>97 (71%)</b>	<b>3 (2%)</b>	<b>5 (4%)</b>	<b>13 (10%)</b>	<b>9 (7%)</b>	<b>9 (7%)</b>	<b>136</b>



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