

Fine Art European Forum: Paradox

Accademia di Belle Arti Palermo 21/22.09.2009

Transition and Progression in Fine Art Education and Research

Reports of the 4 breakout groups

Curriculum Development - chaired by Sean Cummins and Maia Mancuso

Exchange and Collaboration - chaired by Andres WieCheRink

Professional Practice, External Connections - chaired by Emilia Telese

Research and Doctoral Level - chaired by Kevin Atherton

The four reports were written by:

Sean Cummins /Curriculum Development

Andres WieCheRink/ Exchange and Collaboration, with a separate summary from Christine Pybus

Emilia Telese/ Professional Practice, External Connections

Kevin Atherton and Maria Antonietta Malleo /Research and Doctoral Level

Sharing differences and considering them a resource has been one of the aims and challenges of Palermo conference, putting on the table the "hot" issues of this particular moment of "transition and progression in Fine Art education and research" in Europe and establishing specific working groups.

The reports, written by Sean Cummins/Curriculum Development, Andres Wiecherink/ Exchange and Collaboration, with a separate summary from Christine Pybus, Emilia Telese/ Professional Practice, External Connections, Kevin Atherton and Maria Antonietta Malleo /Research and Doctoral Level, show the complexity of the discussion, where participants shared experiences, recommendations or simply their vision.

Rather than give solutions, the reports introduce us to open perspectives and this can be considered part of the richness of the work in itself.

That's why most of the reports use an interrogative form.

How to maintain traditional skills and improve in the same time non-traditional knowledge? How to help students be self-directed and responsible for their own learning? What are the strengths of current practice in your institution (Curriculum Development)?

How art practice and research are related? Is the research of artist "untranslatable"? How to evaluate and "measure" the artistic knowledge?

How to teach art as research (Research and Doctoral Level)?

How does academic study and research relate to the art ecosystem? How can be the UK Art Ecosystem model transferred to other contexts in Europe?

What are the attitudes of art graduates to society (Professional Practice/External Connections)?

Is it possible to have a different way of exchange within or without the Erasmus programme? How to make student exchange more focused in a social and cultural foreign environment? How to implement staff exchange and interaction (Exchange and Collaboration)?

These are some of the questions that show how wide the spectrum of debate was.

In publishing the Palermo conference proceedings, PARADOX aims to show a possible path for shared action of the European network of art professionals, researchers and educators in Fine Art.

*The names of the members of the working groups are shown only for the Curriculum Development and Research and Doctoral Level groups, in the other cases only the provenience of the participants was recorded.

Curriculum Development

Identifying diverse Fine Art curricula initiatives across Europe we will be looking at the challenges this presents from different geographical and other perspectives.

Chaired by Maia Mancuso (Accademia di Belle Arti, Palermo) and Sean Cummins (Nottingham Trent school of Art and Design)

Report by Seán Cummins

Participants: Mike Griffiths (Arts University College, Bornemouth, UK), Nicholas Houghton (University of the Arts, CLTAD, London, UK), John Wigley (Birmingham City University, School of Art, UK), Jane Lee (Central St Martins College, Art and Design, London, UK), Piero Burzotta, Grazia D'Arpa, Giovanna Filippello, Maia Mancuso, Nelida Mendoza, Salvatore Rizzuti, Vittorio Vicari (Accademia di Belle Arti, Palermo, Italy), Juhani Jarvinen (Saimaa, University of Applied Sciences/Fine Arts, Finland), Emilia Bouriti (Athens School of Fine Arts, Greece), Sean Cummins (School of Art and Design, Nottingham Trent University, UK), Valentina (Interior Design student from Verona, Italy).

A diverse group of 14 artists and teaching professionals and one student met as a breakout group to focus on curriculum development in the subject Fine Art across Europe. The debate was held in Italian and English with thanks to Maia Mancuso for her endurance in both translating and participating. We held two sessions over two days. In the first session the discussion centred on what we wanted to bring to the breakout group in relation to curriculum development for fine art, what were the issues those in the room most wanted to discuss? This took up most of the first day.

The second day was largely concerned with exploring one theme; looking at post-disciplinary practice in relation to specific skills acquisition. We turned to three questions to unravel this theme.

What are the strengths of current practice in your institution?
What are the challenges of current practice in your institution?
What recommendations do we have for future practice?

As was to be expected the responses were as much about difference in student cohorts and resources as about ideology. These variations in resources included technical support, studio and workshop provision. There was a productive discussion about the asymmetrical relationship between aspirations and challenges for the northern European fine art curricula and the southern. How could this be valued and explored usefully rather than ironed out?

It was an intense session with much heated debate around how to value the different cultural traditions which supported such diverse curricula. Of specific note was the counter flow between north and south that both identified something of the other curriculum which would be desirable for their students to experience. This led to the recommendations looking at how we could use staff mobility to value differences in curricula.

I would like to thank the Accademia di Belle Arti of Palermo for hosting this event which permitted a unique dialogue between colleagues across Europe.

A note about the bullet point feedback below. There are divergent and sometimes contradictory voices in the bullet point feedback reported below. This represents the dialogue we had and is taken from the flip chart notes I took at the time in front of the participants. No attempt has been made to homogenize the responses to the questions, consequently the bullet points are deliberately divergent and largely unresolved.

Topics and questions the participants proposed for the workshop

- The balance between Post-disciplinarity and making skills
- A Paradox, if there is nothing we *have* to teach what is our subject?
- What are we preparing students for?
- Who decides the curriculum?
- Current re-write; Students already outward facing, what is our culture (not driven by outside)
- New course at Palermo, what could be for Fine Art? Comparison with private institutions and fashion
- Problem... how to relate to the territory?
- Possibility of confusion in the conversion to new realities, what is the relation to the established tradition of fine arts?
- Compare + contrast across Europe, to help with reform and PHD planning
- How to connect with the profession?
- Starting MA Fine Arts, Bologna (4+1 or 3+2). What length of study at different levels is appropriate?
- To know more about other courses across Europe, creating connections, satisfy curiosity.
- In the drive to contemporary practice, how do we preserve our traditions? Practice is also research in our culture.
- Share how European colleagues develop curriculum. How many years of study for BA + MA = 5 yrs. Do artists need PhDs?
- How does mobility affect the curriculum? Differences in accreditation across Europe. Can Palermo students apply for MA across Europe?
- How to help students be self-directed and responsible for their own learning in level 2?
- To have a structure which prioritizes the things we value
- What do we take out of the curriculum to make space for new initiatives?

The 4 Main themes

- Is there a curriculum which incorporates Post-Disciplinarity and skills acquisition?
- What is the parity of structure of BA +MA across Europe?
- What is the relationship to the professional environment?
- What is the purpose of an Art School and can we ask 'Why Art Schools?'

Post-Disciplinarity and skills acquisition

What are the **strengths** of current practice in your institution?

- A metaphor for skills acquisition is the uphill journey students take with staff acting as professional mountain guides using the reflective nature of their practice as a compass for the making skills with optional workshops as a survival guide
- Discipline specific intense workshops to acquire a skill. Students immersed in a single practice, 45 students over 3 years.
- Broad based model, breadth + flexibility with a Fine Art Practice wide view encourages students to critically engage with diverse practice, therefore they become outward looking. Relational aesthetics and site specific projects making work in response to particular

situations

- Discipline specific atelier system which values tradition
- Good critical skills taught with philosophical background. Intimate connection with discipline skills. Good staff teaching in the studio, students present work weekly some times, seminars with text to encourage a critical reading of the work's location.

What are the **challenges** of current practice in your institution?

- Increase in the Student/Staff ratio, now over 25/1, how to equip all students within the available resources?
- Why do we have to always change?
- Where is the place for 'drawing' in the curriculum?
- Increase in numbers make the individual skills journey problematic
- Where is the place for self-directed practice in atelier system? Pushing students out of the nest!
- How do students recognize a skill deficit and then learn traditional skills not covered by the staff team?
- Students now teaching themselves + each other?
- We have no technical staff or librarians
- How to teach a tradition with a contemporary, critical context, the why?

What **recommendations** do we have for future practice?

- There is a desire to value the differences in curricula because there is something culturally valuable in this difference
- Rather than making assumptions from our own context we should try to understand the context of different curricula
- Use Erasmus strategically for discipline skills exchange
- International mobility for all staff including technical
- Try to promote the specific benefits of student exchange within a curriculum
- Propose a network for courses where students can move through different European art schools to acquire skills
- Is tradition tacit skills? Looking at each other's curricula models helps us to learn and value this practice.

Exchange & Collaboration

Making Fine Art student exchange more focused and specific, based on existential & artistic emancipation in different social and cultural environments. Developing and implementing staff exchange, based on similarity and difference or agreement and dissent, "pushing your personal and professional envelopes" and doing what you are good at in a foreign context, challenging solitary souls into cross-fertilization and interaction with worthy allies.

Chaired by Andres WieCheRink (Utrecht School of the Arts)

Report by Andres Wieckerink

Making student exchange more focused and specific, based on existential & artistic emancipation, in a different social and cultural, foreign environment

Make sure there is personal contact and that you know the school.

Prepare the student, they should have a strong *objective and intention*, for Why & Where they go!

Templates of course description, credit allocation, duration of courses, module description...all should be available on site from the participating schools for improved visibility.

Consultation with relevant teaching staff involved in the exchange.

Make sure there is an update available on existing and potential contracts.

Consider devising a specific exchange module, for exceptional cases, embedded within the contract.

Exchange should (only) be a reward for good performing students.

Between exchanging schools there should be a *synchronization* of assessment criteria.

Insight in level and marks is essential and who is going to mark at the conclusion of the exchange and where.

Assessments and markings should go back to the home institution.

There should be a *common weekly forum*, in the host institute for participating exchange students (in English).

When they return the students are obliged to make a presentation and address staff and students of the home institute.

Workshops should be open until 22h00.

Make sure that Erasmus financial support for the students with minimal recourses is adequate.

Developing and implementing staff exchange, based on similarity & difference or agreement & dissent 'pushing the limits of your personal and professional perimeter' and do what you're good at in a foreign context and environment

To make more of bi-lateral, non-Erasmus staff exchange agreements for tutorials, mutual projects and possible lectures and presentations for self employed (graduation year) studio classes.

These are no-fee exchanges since they are executed by regular employed staff. Travel and overnight expenses are paid for by their schools.

I include my agreement of non-erasmus staff exchange with the School of Fine Art in Birmingham. My suggestion is that we adopt this model and evaluate it during our next steering group meeting.

Birmingham City University School of Art

Concept bi-lateral exchange of staff and students within and without Erasmus

Year 4:

Graduation Procedure

EXTERNAL FINE ART ASSESSOR/JUROR

One to one exchange of an artist staffperson during end of May/beginning of June during the annual pre-graduation show/final examination (externendag).

Year 3 & 4

Guest Artist/Artist in Residence

STAFF EXCHANGE ON A BI-MONTHLY TWO DAY BASIS

Early morning flight + first full day/evening (overnight stay)

second full day + late afternoon/evening or (overnight stay)next morning return flight.

Or, if possible, for a month as Artist in Residence.

Introduction & Visual Presentation + Talk

Group(9/12) Dialogue & Observation & Consideration & Reflection & Opinion

Tutorials & Individual Assessments

Based on bi-lateral agreements and staff member position/

Additional airfare and hotel/guesthouse for two nights.

Year 3

Student Exchange

Pre-Graduation year

Minimum of one module (08 weeks)

Maximum of two modules (16 weeks)

Exchange and collaboration - Report by Christine Pybus

Recommendations to Administrators of Fine Art Courses Student Exchanges

The Working Group were concerned at lack of proper research and in depth knowledge of the exchange colleges to which your students are sent to. The Group considered it essential that there was personal knowledge of the Fine Art College and Course and a known personal contact at the other college.

Have a cap on how many contracts that your college has active at any one time and assess the viability and success of the exchanges contracts at regular intervals, perhaps every two years. Many contracts remain dormant and are rolled on from one year to the next by International Offices. A small number of valued and well-used creative exchange arrangements coupled with the familiarization of those at departmental level with the exchange course and its staff, contributes to the success of the exchange and student experience.

The group was unanimous in its assertion that the evaluation of the students work done during the exchange should be presented to and the responsibility the home institution, and that accepting and recording the marks of the host institution onto a students records was hugely problematic. A short written account of the student's performance and involvement during the exchange from the host institution was considered highly desirable.

That a standard questionnaire that ERASMUS coordinators could send out to partner schools so as to gather essential academic and administrative information, a draft of which will be available for the Cork Paradox Conference 2010.

Recommendation to take to the administrating body of Erasmus

Request that the administering body of Erasmus have available on their website all the colleges and participating departments and courses involved with Erasmus and overview of their courses, brief course description, and their credit allocation.

Request that the mobility grant be increased. Currently our experience was that only the more privileged students that can afford to go on exchange.

Suggestions from the working party to participating Fine Art Courses

Only send well performing students with a good work ethos on exchange. Accurately assess their ability to communicate in the language/s used at the host institution to which the students are applying.

The Group's experience was that it was the confident and capable student that could negotiate the independent nature of a Fine Art study programme abroad and that both students and staff should take into account that there is often a even greater degree of independence required from the student at the host college than at home institution.

Some of the Working group related their experience as hosts operating common weekly forums for exchange students facilitated by a member of studio staff. The purpose of these was to discuss work, and to assess the student's experience and assimilation both in respect of the course and their social interaction.

For the home institution to consider devising a specific exchange module which can substitute for any lost modules.

Professional Practice, External Connections

The profession of the artist in the real world: how does academic study and research relate to the art ecosystem? Dynamics and dialogue beyond academia, towards professional practice in Europe.

Chaired by Emilia Telese (a-n The Artist Information Company)

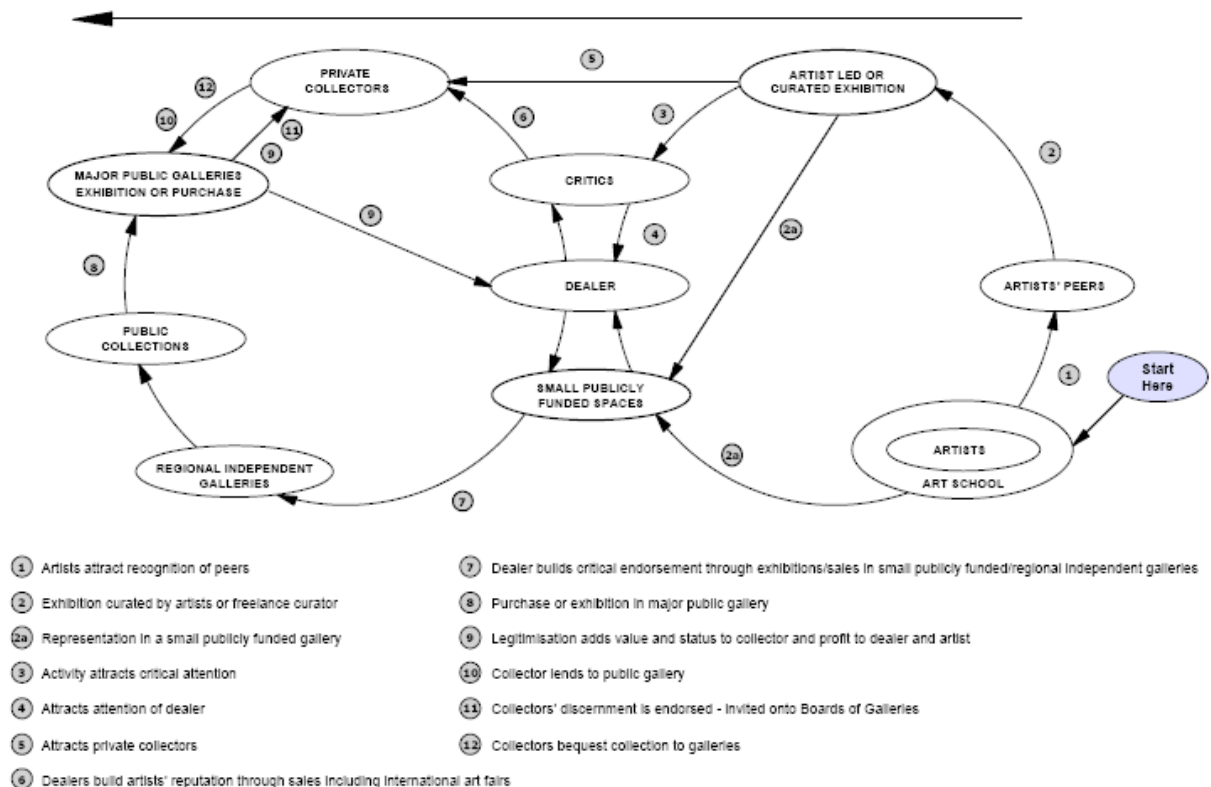
Report by Emilia Telese

The workshop involved 20 professors from the European Paradox network, including participants from the UK, Ireland, Belgium/Flanders, the Netherlands, Italy and Spain and two students representatives from Palermo and Milan. The workshop deliberately included students as it focused on their professional development and their understanding of life after college.

Background research

The workshop referred to the Art Ecosystem model, created for the Arts Council England Taste Buds Report by research consultants Morris Heargraves McIntyre 2004. This model was the result of a two year research programme involved over 6000 artists, dealers, buyers and galleries and looked at the development potential of the art market in England.

The model is interesting because it looks at the relationships between different players in the art world and the workshop participants agreed that it could be in large part applied to their respective EU countries.



In the UK, 3,800 art and design students graduate annually from 350 Fine Art BA courses of which 40 to 50 with a designated professional practice module (source: UCAS and a-n The Artists' Information Company). The 2000 Destination and reflections survey (including 2000 graduates of art and design study by the Centre for Research into Quality (CRQ) at the University of Central England in Birmingham) stated that 42% of art and design graduates have had some form of self-employment since graduating; In 2008 – 2010 the Creative Graduates Creative Futures report from the University of the Arts in London shows that the percentage is up 3% with 45% of graduates who had worked freelance since graduating, with 23% self-employed and 18% running a business.

In the UK, the overall level of self-employment amongst artists is higher than for the creative industries as a whole (41%) The Destination and reflections survey further stated that 65% of all graduates in the sample were earning less than £15,000 per annum and only 6% are earning over £25,000. 27% of the sample have done some form of unpaid work since graduating. This is mostly on a part-time basis complementing other work and tends to be in small organizations. About a third of it is 'altruistic', and mainly done in not-for-profit organizations and two-thirds is seen as having potential to enhance career opportunities. Research by a-n The Artists' Information Company conducted on their NAN bursaries for artists' groups between 2004 and 2009 has linked a substantially higher success rate for bursary applications by early career artists from art colleges with a structured module for professional development, as opposed to applications coming from regional areas where there were a higher number of artists but a lack of consistent provision of professional development at Higher Education level.

The Paradox workshop brought the UK situation as a sample of the employment perspectives of art and design graduates. In different countries, the situation is mildly different, with reports from countries which have a public infrastructure for art funding allowing for better welfare of art practitioners, and a recognition of their profession contributing to a lesser "brain drain" from that country, were graduates stay in countries that help them make a living as professional artists. Examples were brought of the more favourable tax and government provisions in the Netherlands, France and Germany. There was overwhelming agreement that a homogenization of the provision of accredited professional development modules in European art colleges would help standardize the minimum "thriving conditions" in all countries , with a better provision of prospects' information accounting for a better art ecosystem understanding and therefore a fairer employment of artists in the long run.

The group looked at changes to be made on a European, country by country level for undergraduate students and after graduation in order to achieve this homogeneity:

Undergraduate changes

- To homogenize the provision of "COT" centres within all Fine Art institutions in Europe. In Italy, COT stands for Tutoring and Orientation Centres.
- To clearly inform students about the dynamics of the contemporary art world
- To start "make yourself visible" projects
- To create links between Fine Art Academies and public institutions and organizations in charge of professional welfare
- To increase the presence of visiting professors and artists within HE institutions
- To create programmes for students' experience in other contexts, such as other FA courses, galleries, museums, or professional organisations. Within these contexts, create opportunities for students to know the "behind the scenes" work at organizations and institutions in the above contexts.

- To create Postgraduate programmes in Professional Practice
- To create a European-wide curriculum and an Erasmus card for students to be recognized abroad
- To provide a "survival toolkit" for students about how to work as a professional artist, which students take with them on graduation
- To create a wide ranging set of information about employment possibilities post graduation

Changes after graduation

- A more homogenized system of evaluation for curricula and a peer reviewed evaluation of study plans
- Develop artists' identities and build networks which are fluid
- Development of country specific and European funding schemes for research and development
- A mobile web of exchange which connect artists with the urban and worldwide context and allow artists to have a diversified professional growth
- Experience and competition economic and social development to create markets
- Shake hands, smile
- Create MA programmes in countries where these are not present
- Establish an Artists' Federation, and/or associations which support artists and art educators' welfare
- Create institutionalized spaces for artists to exhibit, in collaboration with prominent art world personalities, with a focus on high quality work
- Develop increased recognition of the professionalism of artists within public institutions
- Creating space in the curriculum for professional practice modules with appropriate accreditation

The situation was further analysed and the ways in which the above changes would happen was broken down into three stages:

1st stage : develop infrastructure and conceptual changes

1. Interaction between teachers and art professionals
2. A dedicated actual space in each art school for APD training
3. Collaborative practice and networking
4. Responsible and responsive students who are in touch with reality
5. Involvement of art professionals and artists at every level of their career
6. Understand what students want from their course thorough assessment
7. Contact with different realities such as the Erasmus programme
8. A programme for professional practice in art, design and media, designed and delivered by professional practitioners

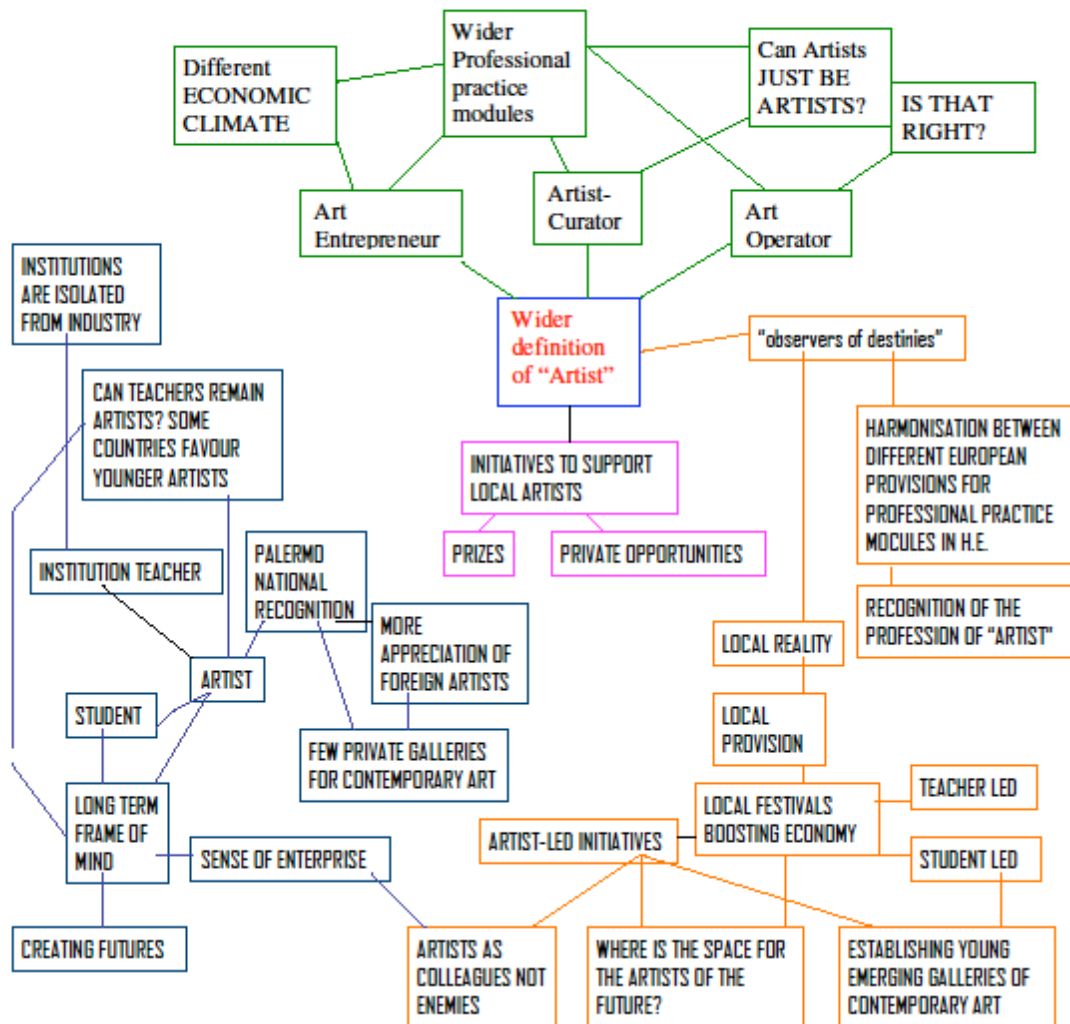
2nd stage: clarify the aims of the changes:

1. Aiming to create different experiences
2. Art students don't necessarily want a one-way career, including teaching. Aim to inform about all different careers paths, linear and non-linear
3. Prepare students for life after university
4. To be realistic, to contribute to the development of a new vision for Europe. What are the attitudes of art graduates to society?
5. To give students the tools of the trade for an adaptive and responsive future.

3rd stage: to create long-term changes in HE institutions:

1. New curriculum involving all art communities
2. Less bureaucracy for teachers, allowing them to keep practicing as artists
3. Space in the curriculum for Artists' Professional Development
4. Students leave with an identity which is strong and viable
5. Address students' need throughout their courses, not at a single point
6. Establish European practice based research funds aimed at artists, students and teachers
7. Create integrated relationships with art institutions

At the end of the workshop, a mind map was created to respond to the perceived ecosystem of the art world proposed in the beginning. The map explored a wider definition of *artist* taking into account the different roles that artists have in their professional practice, responding to their needs and non-linear career paths:



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Research and Doctoral Level

Is there a real alternative to a research process that theorizes practice? Is practicing the theory a more useful way to arrive at practice itself as "the site" of research?

Chaired by Kevin Atherton (National College of Art, Dublin)

Report by Kevin Atherton and Maria Antonietta Malleo

Participants: Kevin Atherton (National College of Art and Design, Dublin, Ireland), John Butler (Birmingham City University, UK), Stephanie James (The Arts University College, Bournemouth, UK), Ana Garcia Lopez (Facultad de Bellas Artes UGR, Granada, Spain), Miguel A. Guillem and Blanca Rosa Pastor (Facultad de Bellas Artes UGV, Valencia, Spain), Ewa Bobrowska (Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, Poland), Yolande Padilla (Délégation aux Arts Plastiques, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, Paris, France), Corinne Peuchet (École Supérieure d'Art du Havre, France), Christina Della Giustina, (Hogeschool voor de Kunsten Utrecht, The Netherlands), Peter Sonderen (ArtEZ Institute of the Arts, The Netherlands), Umberto De Paola, Renato Galasso, Francesca Genna, Angela La Ciura, Maria Antonietta Malleo, Rosanna Ruscio, (Accademia di Belle Arti, Palermo, Italy).

Ana Garcia Lopez took the notes, Umberto De Paola and Maria Antonietta Malleo reported to the Plenary.

Art research in Europe

The presentation from the members of the working group of the situation in their own institutions regarding research and doctorate programs in Fine Art and their expectations has highlighted conditions both of convergence and of diversity for topics, funds and typology of institutions (art schools, academies, universities, etc.) in the European context.

An epistemology of art as research

The panel identified and debated questions (that show the problematic nature and the appeal of the issue) such as:

How to define research in the Arts?

Because research in Fine Art is in the "body" and visuality of the artwork and can't be verbalized, is the research of artist untranslatable?

The artist couldn't know what is looking for...

Is it good for an artist to make research?

What does it mean for "scientific value" in art research?

Are methodologies from other, more established disciplines, with a longer research tradition, applicable to Fine Arts?

How to evaluate and measure the artistic knowledge?

What kind of process do art practices need to go through to become (proper) research?

Are there particular research topics for the sector to research?

And who validates this research and how?

Moving from these questions, it was emphasized the need to start a process of self-critical reflection of art as a creative process of knowledge, to clarify the terms surrounding practice-based research and the benefits that research might have in an artist's practice, to establish criteria that are both appropriate to Fine Arts but which have credibility in the wider field.

Four criteria for research evaluation could be:
innovation (development of new knowledge);
accountability;
impact;
transfer of knowledge to the society.

Theoretical and methodological issues include both the specificity of artistic research through practice, within practice, as practice, action, form, visibility, expressed with poetics, and the argumentation of art practice as a knowledge process (research) to communicate with a theoretical and written reflection.

For the definition of an epistemology of art as research – also through a document?- could an interdisciplinary methodology with a double and integrated modality of written and visual texts be developed from artists together with other actors such critics?

It was also underlined the importance to evaluate the relationship and effects of PHD over the professional sphere and the links among research, resources and involved institutions.

It was further proposed to constitute an observatory on thesis produced in Europe (considering contents, tools, needs, costs).

An integrated pedagogy of art as research

Another issue arisen was the "pedagogical turn": how to teach the research of art, art as research? It needs to conceive art as research (and education), to develop a culture of research and a new, specific pedagogy of art as research in the BA-MA-PHD system.

Toward a plan of action

The panel has therefore identified three lines of actions:

- Definition of a specific epistemology of art as research
- Recognition of the rights of artists in Europe to make research (same rights in every country)
- Constitution of an observatory on thesis produced in Europe.