

Culture and Human Rights Now

Proposals for “culture and human rights”

Summary of the panel discussion

Vienna City Hall, 20 June 2016, part of the FRA Fundamental Rights Forum

1. Background

Rarely have new approaches been more necessary, and not only in the field of cultural policy: European societies are currently in a period of profound transformation which, in turn, calls for new forms of cooperation and the development of future scenarios. Stimulating the development of new concepts and projects was the central aim of the “Culture of Human Rights Now” event, which took place as part of the first EU Fundamental Rights Forum. The proposals not only relate to the City of Vienna but are also general suggestions for other cities and municipalities. The following are the results of the discussion with representatives of Viennese cultural institutions: Anna Badora, Artistic Director, Volkstheater, Vienna; Matti Bunzl, Director, Wien Museum; Matthias Naske, Artistic Director, Wiener Konzerthaus; Alf Netek, Chief Marketing Officer, Kapsch AG; Ula Schneider, Artistic Director, SOHO in Ottakring; moderated by: Beate Winkler, painter, author and former Director of the EUMC, now the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights.

2. Introduction

Human rights and culture are two areas of life which are still too poorly connected: culture in all its facets arises from a confrontation with ‘the unfamiliar’ and the new; it gives us the opportunity to experience diversity in a positive way. Culture supports our ability to deal with contradictions and opposites – as well as our ability to allow them to exist and ask questions – and to value those questions. Furthermore, culture promotes: curiosity, imagination, creativity, the ability to think outside the box and the refinement of our senses and our sense of meaning. This all happens when we open ourselves up to culture. We need all of these things now more than ever in order to meet the greatest, most pressing societal challenges that face us **now** – because we are in a period of profound social change.

3. Results of the discussion on the following questions

3.1. What sort of content should we focus on to reach our goals – what is important?

- We need shared future scenarios. What kind of society do we want to live in? What should the world look like in the future? In that context, it is essential to develop the following ideas in particular:
 - Supporting a new conception of ‘WE’ that acknowledges people as global players and also recognises their need for togetherness;

- art and culture should be more widely facilitated and communicated – not just as a project for the elite; and
- improving, broadening or initiating partnerships of different organisations in a city on culture and human rights in order to support a new 'WE'.

3.2. How do we achieve this?

- Representing a pluralistic city in the projects and programmes on offer;
- offering innovative programmes that reach (new) groups and respond to individual living situations;
- perceiving linguistic diversity as a positive thing;
- valuing and accepting different social and political perspectives – without relinquishing one's own and viewing that as a strength;
- participating – participation on an equal footing and participation of the most diverse groups;
- understanding art and culture as a process;
- engaging the public in dialogue in a far more considered and open way;
- imparting political theory in an unbiased way and communicating it with humour so as to appeal to the senses;
- creating teams with diverse people and strengthening cooperation; and
- starting work on cultural and human rights topics in schools (including vocational schools).

3.3. What do we need?

3.3.1. Structures:

- long-term outlook and regularity;
- a change to existing structures and policies, e.g. to foster greater inclusivity;
- establishing and precisely tracking our own targets with partners; and,
- further support from the City of Vienna, additional funding for a culture of human rights.

3.3.2. Image and narrative:

- Enabling common visions to come to life;
- communicating positives, potential and what has already been achieved in projects more clearly; and
- representing Vienna more clearly as an international, global city.

3.3.3. Cooperation – publicly visible cooperation with different groups:

- Networking political, economic and social organisations and art institutions in order to operate in society on a shared platform and under a shared slogan;
- the collaboration and cooperation of all those affected;
- forming alliances to enable exchange; and
- fostering cooperation: recognising complementary strengths and making full use of differing strengths.



3.4. Which obstacles have to be overcome?

- Attitude that it's all a 'hoax' – i.e. that it is not 'real' culture;
- 'pigeonholing' – anything contradictory is avoided;
- uncertainty (about) the (role of the) media/journalists;
- lack of a holistic conception of culture and 'cultural visions';
- how do we reach the 'other 50%' to avoid polarisation?; and
- saturation or over-saturation of parts of society with political issues or resistance to art.

3.5. What are some good examples of initiatives and projects?

- Proposal for a new cooperative culture and human rights project for Vienna, e.g. with different organisations carrying out individual projects with individual budgets on a collaborative basis (for info: Vienna Human Rights Office)
- city partnerships and cooperations;
- art in unusual public spaces or in socially troubled areas: e.g. world-class music at the Brunnenpassage in Vienna or in socio-cultural or intercultural initiatives such as SOHO in Ottakring or Radio Orange;
- using theatre more consciously as a forum for social discourse;
- expanding the use of theatre as a route to inclusion;
- supporting the 'Social Climate Alliance'¹;
- developing and supporting art projects with young people and artistic creatives – such as the 'Rütli' schools in Berlin²;
- promoting projects designed to reduce child poverty – such as those run by the Volkstheatre and Volkshilfe;
- 'Hat's g'schmeckt?' – cooperation between the Wien Museum and W24; and
- developing new opportunities for communication and inclusion: e.g. the Kapsch blog³.

3.6. Which ideas for the future were identified?

- Creating a pluralistic art and cultural offering;
- promoting those media which improve the political and social climate;
- demanding and fostering spaces for reflection;
- developing a new mindset of solidarity and cohesion;
- developing a global 'WE': new forms of cooperation;
- making artistic/cultural experience more tangible in all types of school; and raising awareness of the significance of people's own human rights on a local level for all people in any given city.

¹ A consortium of institutions from civil society, business, politics and administration whose goal is to improve the social climate in Austria.

² Former 'problem schools' which were transformed into functioning community schools.

³ An online platform with information on business areas and a multimedia representation of various promising developments.