

Urszula Szuścik* 

Community, Art and Aesthetic Education

Abstract

In the article, the topic of community is presented in relation to art, education, and aesthetic education. Attention was paid to the value of art and related educational activities in shaping community. The art refers to the work of Joseph Beuys and his interpretation of social art and social sculpture. Artistic activities that are proposed in the creative activities of pupils were indicated, such as: happening, art action, collage, assemblage, and even street art. These types of creative activities develop students' skills of cooperation in a group, their tolerance for the diversity of artistic solutions, their ability to express themselves through physical matter and creating artistic matter, creative courage and being in a group, and, in sum, helping to develop creatively and socially. Me and others, others and me and creativity, and art with us, we all create a community.

Keywords: community, art, education, cooperation, creativity.

Wspólnotowość a sztuka i kształcenie estetyczne

Abstrakt

Zagadnienie wspólnotowości ujęto w odniesieniu do sztuki, edukacji i wychowania estetycznego. Zwrócono uwagę na wartość sztuki i związanych z nią działań edukacyjnych w kształtowaniu wspólnotowości. W sztuce nawiązano do twórczości Josepha Beuysa i jego interpretacji sztuki społecznej i rzeźby społecznej. Wskazano na działania artystyczne, które są proponowane w działaniach twórczych wychowanków, jak: happening, akcja plastyczna, collage, assemblage, a nawet street art. Tego typu formy twórczej aktywności rozwijają w wychowankach umiejętności współdziałania w grupie, tolerancji na odmiennosć rozwiązań artystycznych, wyrażania się przez materię fizyczną i tworzenia materii plastycznej, szerszej artystycznej, odwagi twórczej i bycia w grupie, tym samym rozwoju twórczości i rozwoju społecznego. Ja i inni, inni i ja, i twórczość oraz sztuka z nami tworzymy wspólnotowość

Słowa kluczowe: wspólnotowość, sztuka, edukacja, współdziałanie, twórczość.

* University of Silesia in Katowice.

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Introduction

The question of community has individual and group-related, collective dimensions. It fits into the field of social sciences, including sociology, psychology and education, as well as communication and the humanities – history, art history. It is also a category of human social and cultural development and cultural differences. Human beings in their civilization and cultural development need a relationship with another person, mutual exchange of experiences, learning, communication. The encounter with a new person or group with their customs, rituals, tools and language forces mutual exchange, debate, observation, imitation or the creation of new forms, objects and thus the needs and possibilities for their realization, i.e. to adopt a creative attitude. David Bakan was the first to propose the concepts of communality and causality, which represent the main areas of human existence, i.e. “every person is the person who realizes their goals (causality) and everyone is also a member of a community and a participant in social relationships (community)” (Wojciszke 2010: 173). Vicki Helgeson developed his concept of “causal orientation and community orientation as two major personality traits” (Wojciszke 2010: 173). The need for participation in the community and individual development are anchored in human nature and their psychophysical balance. The formation of a person as a result of interaction in the community, their life, forms a person as a person, allowing them to discover their abilities, skills, their development and training. It can be said that this is a requirement for life orientation. The social and cultural environment varies, i.e. it promotes development or has a depressive effect on the individual. It should be assumed that the individual’s attitude towards their immediate environment as they develop is positive, as it provides a pattern of reactions to various lived, observed, experienced, and imitated life situations through which the individual learns to be in one social environment. Over time, in the course of forming and encountering other individuals, groups, patterns of behavior, and developing individual skills, the individual confronts the patterns of the familiar community with new experiences through contact with other communities (both in the narrow and broader sense). Reflection and with it questions about the meaning and value of life, decisions, self-realization and rebellion against this world and its values arise. I would say that it is a very complex process of development and psychological and social maturation of a person throughout their life, from beginning to end. I dare say that the quality of the socio-cultural environment largely determines the personal dimension of the individuals in a community. It can lead systemically to the unification of the social group or to an emphasis on the process of individualization and development of the abilities of the individual, diversity. At the same time, the mature person, aware of their abilities and self-realization, introduces or proposes within the community new possibilities, paths of development, innovations, creative solutions and discoveries. It transforms and changes the image of the community. The individualization and transformation process of the modern social order, its complexity, is taken up in the considerations of sociologists (e.g. Szacki 2005; Bauman 2000). Importantly:

The problem of the links between the process of individualization and the emergence of new forms of community is also important because it concerns one of the perennial debates in sociology, namely the relationship between the individual and the broader social environment. According to theorists of late modernity, or postmodernity, under conditions of disintegration of traditional ties and institutions and privatization of religion and morality, the individual seeks new forms of identification. Therefore, identity becomes a key category in considering the individual and society (Olcoń-Kubicka 2009: 8).

Identity defines who I am, who I am becoming and who I want to be. It is an indication of the place, the group from which a person comes, thus the value system in which they were and are currently shaped and raised. The value system is also culture and art, aesthetic patterns brought up from our living environment. Art, as we know, is a reflection of aesthetic needs and cultural values preferred in a given socio-cultural environment of local (folk art, regional art, etc.), national, European or global dimensions. Aesthetic and artistic values grouped and formalized in a work of art or artistic activity shape our tastes, needs and preferred aesthetic values at a given time. The creator and his art change the world, our ideas about it, perceptions, knowledge and language. It also contributes to a change in education, education through art and into art. Is art an expression of community? Yes, an expression of the community of a group of people, their level of life, aesthetic and personality needs.

Art and its social dimension

As I pointed out earlier, art has a social dimension in its broad and narrow perception; even if it is socially rejected, it always arouses a social reaction. It often serves as a compass of social life, pointing out values that are important and overlooked at a given time, which shape the emotional spheres of social groups, and thus – personality. Particularly in the sociology of art, social psychology, personality-based psychology, the mechanisms of behavior of individuals and groups in given circumstances are analyzed theoretically and empirically. Katarzyna Niziołek (2015) points out the value of art in the formation of civil society. She assumes that if “applied social art” is to induce “change in people,” it cannot be elitist (Niziołek 2015: 19). She writes:

Nor can [art] assume mere reactivity of the one it changes. On the contrary, change in people is achieved through action – their own and subjective action. In other words, instead of changing people, they should be allowed to change themselves by creating opportunities and providing the means of change. This is just what I believe the transformative, social role of art can consist of – equipping people with intellectual and practical tools for social change (Niziołek 2015: 19).

Artistic activities can take the form of social intervention, such as the artistic activities of Artur Żmijewski or the Sociological Art Collective, founded in 1974 (Fischer 1987: 299; Niziołek 2015: 19). One should cite an artist significant for contemporary art and its transformations, namely Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), who was the first to use the terms social art and social sculpture. He believed that anyone who creates, acts, in any profession is an artist. This is related to the characteristic inherent in a human being, which is creativity, the ability to create.

This new image of man [...] must be derived from human creativity. [...] It must be derived from the ability that allows man to be a creator, that is: a creative being. This is the principle of creation. [...] All human knowledge comes from art. Every human ability derives from man's capacity for art, i.e., the capacity for creative action. For where could it come from? Science is merely an offshoot of general creativity. It is for this reason that the artistic education of man should be demanded, is it not? (Beuys 1987: 268).

The addressee of his ideas is the searching individual in society. "The individual release of creative forces in the form of the most developed self-determination possible – this is Joseph Beuys' demand addressed to humanity, which is also valid in 2021" (Briegleb 2021). His ideal was a free, creative, conscious individual who changes the established social order through grassroots action, gradually transforming it inward (Kaczmarek 2001). He was a sculptor, conceptual artist, political thinker and philosopher of art. This is clear from his conception of art, which he called "social sculpture" or "an expanded notion of art" (König 2021). "It assumes that thought, art, and social and political discourses form a unity, and that art and life intertwine" (König 2021).

For him, the concept of social sculpture emerged from a criticism of the existing social order:

the bureaucratized state on the one hand and the capitalist market on the other cause enslavement, objectification and alienation of people. Social sculpture, to the contrary, should be an expression of freedom, which is realized directly through personal participation in the reorganization of social life (power relations, social dependencies). Beuys understood the social order as a total work of art and the individual's participation in this work as an expression of human ability and self-determination. He linked creativity, understood in this way, with morality, the determining factor of which was responsibility – not only for oneself, but also for other people in society (Niziołek 2015: 26-27).

Through individual and collective effort, we shape our world "in such a way that we approach the pole of 'warmth' – of human relations based on cooperation, altruism and love" (Kaczmarek 2001). "This is what the Beuysian expanded conception of art is all about, making it an instrument of democratic, civic participation – as much in the hands of the trained artist as in those of the creative citizen" (Niziołek 2015: 27).

Beuys pointed out the significant role of art in social action, thus – the values that create community, communities and their changes. The interweaving of contem-

porary life with the life experience of the creator, creating a new reality that transforms the creator and society (community), exemplified by Beuys' artworks such as:

Suffice it to mention the legendary *Fat Chair (Stuhl mit Fett)* from 1963, in which, in his own words, fat "makes its way from chaotically dispersed, undirected energy to form." Another project, titled *Fettecke*, took more than twenty years to mature: it's a lump of butter weighing more than five kilograms placed by Beuys in a corner of his studio in Düsseldorf. [...] *Felt Suit (Filzanzug)*, one of Beuys' best-known sculptures from 1970, is also permanently etched in the collective memory. Felt, as he himself repeatedly emphasized, acted as an insulator allowing him to store thermal energy, which was the engine of his creativity (König 2021).

Synthetic material, physical matter becomes a symbol, a profound metaphor for the creator's life experiences and takes on an artistic form. It carries a message for people. It allows us to evaluate the time of the artist's life and the time of the viewer from a different perspective – the trajectory of the creator's life. Physical matter creates a specific artistic matter and creatively affects the viewer.

The avant-garde of twentieth-century art saw the end of skilled, professional art. It can be practiced by anyone and however they want. Mieczysław Porębski (1972) in *Iconosphere* writes that a work of art becomes anything that can focus attention. Art establishes its own rule. This is made possible by creativity – a trait inherent only in a human being. Art is the result of the development of socio-economic-cultural experience (Dewey 1975; Strzeminski 1974; Deręgowski 1990) and surprises with the diversity of concepts and social impact.

Art and aesthetic education

Education is immersion in the world of values and training to participate in the process of building aesthetic experiences within formal and informal education.

Every form of human activity leaves a more or less visible trace of its actions in various areas of life. The product of their work, which is both a work of art and the work of art of a child, a student, represents the form intended and given by them. It represents the image of the aesthetic experience, knowledge and culture level of the place where they grow and grew up. Art, in its diverse forms, represents qualitatively different symbolic values that affect a person, especially a child. The child's perception of the value of beauty occurs initially in the family, in kindergarten, at school, in the natural, geographical and cultural environment in which they grow up. Art is a very important value in education and upbringing. It simultaneously develops a sensitivity to values in both a very broad and narrow sense. This involves the formation of a value system that guides the code of conduct, behavior and decisions in life. As Adam Wegrzecki states: "Axiological maturity means a person's inner opening to values, which is possible only when they have freed themselves from certain restrictions and are able to continue to free themselves" (Wegrzecki 1994: 20). Values shape and

change us. They find expression, among other things, in educational systems and in art. Values are the constitution of thought, including in art. A person accomplishes and transforms private and social reality through their inherent capacity for creativity, creative power, and human consciousness. They are immersed in aesthetic values without even realizing it. Among a person's many needs, aesthetic needs are among the types they satisfy, living in his family, local, cultural environment. This environment shapes the quality of aesthetic needs. It provides aesthetic models, and teaches gradually to interact with culture. In a programmatic way in the course of education, the aesthetic needs of the pupils are developed and shaped, over time transferred to their lives, which is associated with the ability to experience, perceive, reflect on them, and to constitute an aesthetic object¹. This is manifested in aesthetic attitudes and defines aesthetic culture. Aesthetic culture is the expression of human behavior to a variety of aesthetic values in the world, in art. It becomes an image of the general culture of human beings. "Aesthetic experiences superstructure the general experiences of humans" (Szuścik 2017: 93). They shape the personality-integrated individual and affect their community functioning.

Education through art occurs, among other things, through aesthetic education, art education. Aesthetic education is just like the training of aesthetic sensitivity, aesthetic culture in the sense of attitude, the attitude of people towards art or the aesthetic. General aesthetic education is intended to satisfy the cognitive and emotional-imaginative aspirations of a person and ensure the correct formation of their personality spheres (Szuścik 2013: 84).

The image of an individual is determined by the educational environment, which shapes it for themselves and their environment. "The educational environment is that part of a person's environment and the world in which they live, which forms a system of ecological factors that directly or indirectly affect the individual, so that certain educational effects are achieved (Sperling, 1994, p. 169)" (Szuścik 2013: 84).

Education – the education of a person – from the early years of their life until they acquire a profession in adulthood acquaints them with the world of values in a broad sense and develops in them various needs, abilities, skills. It also develops an attitude of self-realization, responsibility, reflection and tolerance towards other people and cultures.

The teacher introduces students to the sign system of art, science and culture. They get to know the students, their needs, and develop in them elementary skills in the use of signs of letters, numbers, music and artistic means, which in time become the basis of their creative development and motivate them to create independently in various spheres of life and at work. It develops their aesthetic needs, aesthetic culture. We interact with each other and thus shape our reality and community, its boundaries, and at the same time the possibilities for transformation and development. Art and its framework are their reflections taking different forms and contents.

¹ Roman Ingarden (1966, p. 43) writes about the constitution of the aesthetic object.

Interaction and community in art education – reflections

An attempt to explain interaction in the experience of art in art education by an educator is both obvious and at the same time can be difficult. The obviousness stems from the method of creative activity in the community of the group and the proposed forms of creative expression, and the difficulty stems from individual differences, temperament, abilities, more generally – from the personality differences of the participants in the classes. Student art and creativity is a peculiar form of communication, which is the result of the mutual action and interaction of social and cultural content. Their development and transformation are precisely due to cooperation in a community, thereby exchanging ideas and experience at different levels of human development (Szuścik 2001: 281). Wincenty Okoń explains that “cooperation, interaction with each other of individuals or groups of people performing their partial tasks to achieve some goal; cooperation is based on mutual trust and loyalty and on submission to a goal duly realized by all individuals or groups” (Okoń 1981: 346). Herbert Read has already pointed out that “education must not only be a process of individualization, but also a process of integration, and therefore of reconciling individual uniqueness with the social community” (Read 1976: 11). Going further, he states that upbringing can be defined as the training of modes of expression, hence “the goal of upbringing should be the artistic formation of educated people, i.e., individuals who are able to use various means of expression effectively” (Read 1976: 17-18). In her discussion of changes in the concept of aesthetic education, this problem of changing the role of art in education – its impact on the social sphere – is analyzed by Mirosława Zalewska-Pawlak (2017: 86-87).

Contemporary art and its transformations influence new concepts, educational programs and methods of working with students. Their activities are characterized by the element of individuality, originality and creativity. At the same time, the social value of creativity is increasing. This is the result of general socio-artistic-cultural transformations, thereby educational. The active participation of observers in the creator’s activities, supporting their actions and also creating the work, gives, among others, such forms of artistic activities as happenings, art actions, installations, *collage*, *assemblage*.

Happening is otherwise an event, one of the forms of contemporary art: “a spectacle that brings together a series of objects, human actions and events that are not connected by a logical plot. It represents a kind of collage that creates new relationships of time and space” (Zwolińska, Malicki 1974: 130). It can be organized according to a strictly defined scenario or improvised with or without audience participation. The purpose of these artistic actions is, among other things, to break conventional habits, behaviors and surprises.

Artistic action is a form of collaborative action between the artist and a group of spectators who participate, thus creating a shared space and an artistic object. It can have the character of long-term, temporally and spatially extended activities carried out in parallel.

Action art is a further continuation of happenings, based on visual action with a planned course. Playful or contesting actions on city streets against indifference among people, destruction of the natural environment (Klein, Kantor). Other actions also belong to this type of art, for example, mail art – a type of action deliberately devoid of meaning, a package wandering by various means of transportation; earth art – a type of artistic action, the material of which is earth, sand, rocks, of great size, such as a many-kilometer-long path-drawing, pouring a mass of asphalt from the top of a rock; water and sky art – observation of variable systems of water movement, e.g., by piling a huge snail-path out of sand, observation of the variability of the sky by means of a specific code delineated by a large metal frame, etc. (Hohensee-Ciszewska 1988: 6).

Art installation is “in the language of contemporary visual art, a term referring to the creation of a work; contemporary creation is mostly not painting, sculpting or modeling, it is installed from concrete elements in space, like an object” (Hohensee-Ciszewska 1988: 40).

Collage, or gluing, is the creation of an image from different materials, which are pasted onto a canvas or other substrate. This can be paper, sand, straw, leather, oilcloth, fabric, wood, a finished object, a photograph, etc. The collage image creates a new reality, often surprising and evoking unusual associations, compositions. It was used in their art by Cubists (Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque), Hans Arp, Henri Matisse, in Dadaism by Kurt Schwitters, in Surrealism by Max Ernst (Zwolińska, Malicki 1974: 71-72; Hohensee-Ciszewska 1988: 19).

Assemblage, from French, means collection. It constitutes a variation of collage. The composition is made of various objects or their parts on a plane or in a space, an open space. It often forms a surprising collection of ready-made objects, sometimes human actions – such as the works of Jean Dubuffet. Sometimes the viewers themselves can regroup, move the elements. Its origins can be traced back to Dadaism, e.g. the works of Kurt Schwitters – a composition from can lids; the artist created forms from remains. It was also used by representatives of Pop Art, such as Robert Rauschenberg, who made assemblages from stuffed birds, telephone books, ties, or Fernandéz Arman, who created works from objects collected in glass boxes (buttons, caps).

In Poland, assemblages were created by Tadeusz Kantor and Władysław Hasior. These compositions contain symbolic content and often evoke a mood of kitsch or bazaar. They are meant to stimulate the viewer to intellectual effort (Zwolińska, Malicki 1974: 36-37; Hohensee-Ciszewska 1988:10).

We should also mention street art, which is an artistic activity directly in public and social space. It is often a provocation – with the aim of arousing the attention of the audience to the problems of the individual or social group(s), to elicit any reaction from the audience. It is an emotional art, with a heavy load of expression, and thus the emotions of young people, rebellious and “screaming” through the images.

Street art is a gallery that can happen anywhere. Riding the bus, looking out the window, passing under an overpass, we can find ourselves in an exhibition that is normalized only by the fact that someone created it. We don't know how long it will be possible to view what we have just experienced. Maybe it will be destroyed by the next viewer, maybe someone will take an interest in the work and it will be preserved – such is the law of the street (Hudzik 2010: 375).

Certain forms of artistic activity force the artist and the participants in an artistic performance to interact and cooperate with one another. Many of these suggestions for a different approach to the nature of the creative process and its organization and flow can be applied to educational and artistic activities in schools. Creative teachers use such methods in their work with children, young or older people.

When proposing alumni activities that require collaboration between each other, it should be taken into account that some of them will be able to carry out a specific group of tasks, while others will need more time and support to complete them. They need to plan the sequence of their activities, detailed tasks until the completion of the artistic task. This type of artistic activity shapes an openness to the perception of different aspects of creative activity, curiosity about diverse approaches to formal and content-related solutions in art and their own creative activity. You develop the ability to read various codes of the artificial language, communicate, search for original solutions and create.

Within the framework of art classes, interaction and a sense of community in the group can be shaped in the implementation of content and activities related to, for example, the construction and development of space in the classroom, outdoors, or in other social spaces, the implementation of design activities, the use of collage, assemblage, art actions. Such creative activities in education were implemented by the “pARTner” group, which brought together visual artists who promoted art in social space (art actions by Wiesław Karolak, Jacek Byszewski, Jacek Bukowski, Blanka Gul-Olszewska, Eugeniusz Józefowski, or art-happening activities of the Wrocław School of the Future by Ryszard M. Łukaszewicz) (Szuścik 2001: 282–284).

Summary

Art permeates life, and life permeates art and gives it form. At the same time, it shapes the characteristics of a particular community, its style, needs and artistic preferences. It reveals community life with its shortcomings, problems and successes. Education and participation in the arts creates unique opportunities for the student's individual and social development. It brings out and emphasizes the values of life and often draws the attention of the young person and others to social problems. Art educates and develops us. Its quality determines our real and imaginary reality. The group's community can be built through educational and artistic activities with the students.

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About the Author

Urszula Szuścik – professor, her research and artistic interests focus on the issues of pre-school and early school education, art education, stimulation of creativity, psychology of creativity and psychology of art, art therapy, artistic graphics, teacher education. Author of three monographs, editor of 7 monographs and co-editor of 42 collective monographs, 48 chapters in collective monographs, numerous articles, and an art education program.

Urszula Szuścik – prof. dr hab., zainteresowania naukowo-badawcze i artystyczne skupiają się wokół problematyki edukacji przedszkolnej i wczesnoszkolnej, edukacji plastycznej, stymulacji twórczości, psychologii twórczości i psychologii sztuki, arteterapii, grafiki artystycznej, kształcenia nauczycieli. Autorka trzech monografii, redaktorka 7 monografii, współredaktorka 42 monografii zbiorowych, 48 rozdziałów w monografiach zbiorowych, licznych artykułów, programu kształcenia plastycznego.