

“The availability of smaller and cheaper digitalized tools has the potential to help craftspeople to move out of low-volume, hand-made crafts, while preserving the originality of their cultural designs.

—Marisa HENDERSON, Hubert ESCAITH

Quote from the article “Handicrafts and the Creative Industry 4.0” in Intersecting Vol. 10 by Marisa Henderson (Creative Economy Section United Nations Conference on Trade and Development UNCTAD, Switzerland) and Hubert Escaith (The World Trade Organization WTO, Switzerland). Image Source: A mural QR-Code from the ‘10,000 Moving Cities-Same but Different’ by the Swiss media artist Marc Lee in the Lodhi Colony Creative District area in New-Delhi, an Initiative by India St+Art Foundation, 2019. Image by Nicolas J.A. Buchoud, all rights reserved ©.





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### “There is no trust in anyone” – On the Fatal Artlessness of the Crisis

A famous dictum by Albert Einstein is: “Problems can never be solved with the same way of thinking that created them.” Einstein used the plural, “problems.” And this plural has become our biggest problem. We live in a time of multi-crisis. The resulting maximum complexity of global crises and developments is considerably intensified by the fact that there is hardly any leeway with regard to a possible prioritization and successive processing of problem areas. Sustainable approaches to solutions within the resulting complex situation must necessarily take place simultaneously and be interlinked. Perhaps this is even the decisive and still often underestimated paradigm shift: The belief in progress, programmed into us in evolutionary terms, has led us to fundamentally value time as a criterion that works for us. Almost all development strategies – whether technological, economic, medical or humanitarian – have traditionally been based on this. For too long, we

have acted as if time working for us would also solve the problem of time working against us. Now, we are faced with the ruins of this erroneous belief – and we see before us, with unprecedented clarity, what it entails: the dismantling of democracy, climate change and famine, climate-induced migration and much more.

What role do art and culture actually play in this multi-crisis context? Now it becomes paradoxical: a subordinate one. In times of great complexity, of all things, we are foregoing the inclusion of a system of order that is essentially based on discourse and inspiration. In fifteen out of sixteen German federal states, for example, culture is only considered a “voluntary service.” This is linked to the legally stipulated obligation to first cut back or discontinue funding for such voluntary services in times of crisis, i.e., especially for art and culture. In the pandemic situation of recent years, it has also become clear that art is the first to disappear, with consequences that often threaten the existence of artists. This is against our own interests. For how else could one explain the fact that art is the first to be summoned after a crisis in order to rebuild society and is itself reinstalled faster than other areas? When industry was still in ruins after the Second World War, the theatres were already performing again. When the process of coming to terms with the civil war-like conflicts in Peru, which dragged on into the 2000s, seemed to be hopelessly stalled, it was, according to the assessment of those politically active at the time, essentially art and culture that were able to get the dialogue

that was indispensable for national reconciliation going again. That, too, is just one example of many.

Why, then, is art not, or far too rarely, included as a constant in social, economic and political considerations in accordance with its significance and value? On the one hand because, especially in Western democracies, the understanding of art is often stuck in pre-democratic times. It is an ornamental accessory, serving as edification and as measurable proof of the system's sophistication. Its impulses and creative power are usually seen and accepted, but not or only rarely really used in the sense of transfer. On the other hand, presumably because art has an often astonishing individual resilience, but not sufficient systemic resilience.

One could even go so far as to state that dictatorial regimes apparently value the influence of art and culture more highly than is the case in democratically constituted systems. They consider art and culture to be such powerful instruments of free will, discourse and transformation that they want to prevent them at all costs. Under the Taliban regime, the Afghan Ministry of Education had banned girls older than twelve from singing. After protests at home and abroad, it was officially withdrawn for image reasons, but the principle remained: Music and art in general are undesirable and de facto forbidden. The mere possession of an instrument can result in arbitrary draconian punishments. Incidentally, the quote in the headline of this text is from a 23-year-old Afghan

musician named Yama Ahadi. He was persecuted in his home country for practicing his art and was eventually able to be brought out of the country by "Mission Lifeline," one of only two musicians to do so. The second had previously been tortured by the regime. Rescuing artists is not a priority.

What makes art so powerful from the point of view of its opponents is its visionary power, its ability to generate imagination and the will to participate and to artistically act out even the most complex processes, to make them comprehensible and thus visible and perceptible as constructively changeable. By its very nature, art always has something to do with transformation. Nowhere is the will and readiness for change better trained than in art. In times of equally urgent and highly complex socio-political, economic and ecological change processes, it is therefore a fatal omission not to lead them in an integrative manner. Mondiacult 2022 in Mexico City, the world's largest intergovernmental cultural conference of the last 40 years with 150 countries participating at the invitation of UNESCO, put it in a nutshell: For the first time, culture was defined as the fourth pillar of sustainable development between states and at the same time recognized as a global public good. Culture is thus recognized as an important driver of overall development. This is spectacular in the sense of the overdue writing down of a long-standing insight. However, it will only be as good and helpful as the commitment and consistency of those who translate this political will into concrete action on the ground, i.e., in cities and countries. And as with the

implementation of the 2030 Agenda, this can only happen successfully if cities (can) take on an active role. For this, resources need to be made available, therefore the financial distribution between nation states and cities needs to be renegotiated, and ultimately the globally valid multilateral system of governance needs to be extended to cities on an equal footing. But that is another matter, albeit equally urgent.

At Harvard University, Prof. Doris Sommer founded an initiative (NGO) that runs an art-based literacy program called “Pre-Texts” in schools in Latin America and Africa, among other places, which promotes writing skills, critical thinking, and civic awareness. As part of this initiative, Sommer has put together a panel of international experts from the fields of political consulting, science, art and culture and launched another program called “Renaissance Now.” It is aimed at senior management in city administrations and the economy. It shows ways and imparts implementation skills in order to use participatory arts to create new resources for solving pressing social problems on the ground.

Behind this is the realization that art is predestined to play a central role in the development and implementation of abundant resources for constructive, proactive and solution-oriented action. It is not only an important promoter of our inner balance and mental health. It is also penetrating ever deeper into academic knowledge processes. For art

and culture are not only critical and empathic companions of change processes, they have the potential to act as game-changers. It is up to us to acknowledge this potential and finally use it consistently. For that means scattering Einstein’s insight from the beginning of this text and turning it into action, making new use of a well-known and hardly exploited resource.