

## Chapter 18. Community projects based on Art & Health: A collaboration between the Faculty of Fine Arts at the Complutense University of Madrid and Madrid city council's *Madrid Salud* Service

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### Abstract

In 2011 the Faculty of Fine Arts at the Complutense University of Madrid, and Madrid City Council's Health Promotion and Prevention Service (*Madrid Salud* Service) signed a collaboration agreement for developing joint projects and activities. This mutual collaboration agreement has generated an extremely active working network, in which university students supported by health service professionals plus Faculty academics and researchers have designed, and developed, community projects based on art and health with a number of groups (children, adolescents, women at risk, people with diversity, etc.). Across all these projects, both artistic creativity and art education have worked as mediators to offer significant experiences in promoting health.

These arts programs (painting, drawing, photography, textiles, dialogues, and art appreciation) have been designed and developed by students for these communities and groups. These community projects based on art and health emphasise the capacity for commitment and collaboration of the groups and communities involved. Students and participants create together and in an atmosphere of trust, with

awareness of their abilities and of the importance of art as a tool for changing their realities, in other words, as a tool for social transformation.

**Keywords:**community project, art, health, education.

## Theoretical background

The relationship between art and health has always existed, and has been very varied and complex, from art as an instrument for representing the healthy body and the diseased body, through to art as alternative therapy for the mentally sick and the use of well-known pictures and murals for decorating hospitals.

However, since the mid-20th century this relationship has been changing. This change has come at a time when art has begun experimenting in spaces and spheres where it was not normally seen up to now, enabling it to come up with arts projects linked to social contexts (public art, action art, participative art, etc.), thereby becoming a vehicle for interpreting and changing human and social reality. Similarly, the concept of health has also broadened to occupy a special place not only in the individual realm of the person but in their social realm too. It is this social realm that is shared by both fields, that of art and that of health, where interactions have been occurring in recent years. One of the keys to understand interactions in this social realm lies in the concept of *community project*. This concept shared by art and health enables us to gain an understanding of the meaning of the actions described in this text, carried out by two institutions that on the face of it seem to be so dissimilar, namely a Fine Arts Faculty and a health promotion and prevention service, *Madrid Salud Service*.

*Community based art projects have been described as “art in other places”, this means that art has left the museum to enter communities*

*and social institutions where it can have a direct and positive impact on people's lives, from the most personal aspects to the most political spheres of social life. (De Nobriga and Schwarzman, 1999).*

In other words, the community project has taken on the guise of the possibility of art to leave its legitimate space (the *museum*) and get out into social reality, but it also has the ability to influence social change:

*Art is a transformative practice that arises from people's struggles to make sense of the world. Art is a language and a form in which people express their deepest needs and beliefs, and in doing so, art lives for them. It is not something put in a building for which you pay to get a glimpse, but do not even receive an explanation. It is the set of practices concerning people's life choices. (Bains and Mesa-Brains, 2002, p. 193).*

However, having briefly described the approaches to the concept of *community project* from an artistic point of view, we should also include the specific definition given by the health promotion and community health sphere, for the interactions described above to be valid. According to the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986),

*Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health. To reach a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, an individual or group must be able to identify and to realize aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment. Community health is a care model aimed at empowering the population of a territory and takes into account the social and cultural context of the community and its risks and opportunities for health.*

This means, then, that the community project understood from a health point of view also implies social change.

## Method / Description of the experience

In 2011 *Madrid Salud* Service, run by Madrid City Council, signed a collaboration agreement with the Faculty of Fine Arts at the Complutense University of Madrid. Along these same theoretical lines, and with a view to working jointly in the area of Health Promotion and Prevention linked to Art, the job of *Madrid Salud* Service is to manage Madrid City Council municipal policy on Public Health Promotion and Prevention in the city of Madrid. They work in spheres such as improving environmental health, promoting healthy habits, and the integrated care of people with addictions. They do this work in the city's 16 health promotion and prevention centres (one for each district in the capital: Villaverde, Vallecas, Usera, Carabanchel, Hortaleza, etc.), and single purpose centres (cognitive decline, healthy habits).

The collaboration agreement signed between the Faculty of Fine Arts and this service was basically aimed at providing technical advice and putting in place art and health projects and practices, and was formalised in the following three kinds of collaborations:

1. Design, execution and evaluation of artistic creativity workshops in collaboration with *Madrid Salud* Promotion and Prevention Centres programmes.
2. Practical experience and tutoring for students on courses taught in the Faculty of Fine Arts (Degree, Master's, PhD, etc.).
3. Mutual technical advice and, if applicable, collaboration in any activities and projects on community health, health promotion and artistic expression that both sides may be interested in.

This collaboration generated a framework of action in which academics, researchers, health promotion professionals started working together on designing and developing community projects in the city of Madrid, in which health promotion and prevention, and the arts have converged. What this paper aims to describe is how interactions between these two institutions and all the agents involved have been made possible in terms of practice. To do this, four objectives have been set:

- To define artistic creativity, specifically art and visual creation, as a tool for use in health promotion, and prevention projects.
- To involve students studying on fine arts courses in social projects with real groups.
- To involve various social agents in community health projects.
- To reflect on the sustainability of this kind of project in the city of Madrid.

The first objective was achieved during the first year through working meetings, pilot experiences and collaboration groups made up of academics and researchers based at the Faculty of Fine Arts, and professionals from the Health Promotion and Prevention Service at *Madrid Salud* (Ávila et al, 2014). An area of common ground had to be identified in which the interests of all the professionals involved could converge, and the viability of these projects could be assessed with real groups (Segura, 2013). The first objective came out of this first phase, to define artistic creativity, specifically art and visual creation, as a tool for use in health promotion and prevention projects.

Once this objective had been defined and the potential of art in these health promotion and prevention contexts had been assessed, it was deemed

necessary to involve the various agents that would make this collaboration possible, leading to the following two objectives: To involve students studying on fine arts courses in social projects with real groups and, to involve various social agents in community health projects.

Involving students in this type of project was not a complex task bearing in mind the new Degree and Master's course structures, which enable university students to undertake the practical side of their academic studies in institutions that work together with the university. These practical placements have meant that in the last four years, more than thirty students (Degree and Master's) have worked on this kind of project in centres run by the *Madrid Salud* Health Promotion and Prevention Service.

Likewise, involving different social agents in these sorts of projects was made possible by making use of the collaborative network. The network of collaboration built through these projects is perhaps one of the most interesting objectives achieved, namely that the Faculty of Fine Arts would enable contacts to be made with museums and cultural institutions in the city of Madrid. This includes the following museums: Thyssen Museum, the National Museum of Romanticism, the national Museum of Decorative Arts, the Cerralbo Museum, the Lázaro Galdiano Museum, the National Museum of Anthropology, and the independent body *Madrid Salud*, with the network of associations with whom it normally works (the Tomillo Foundation's SEPI Prevention and Insertion Service, the Romí Sersení Association of Spanish Gypsy Women, ADISLI, etc.). This amalgam of cultural, social, and health agents have worked jointly on citizen participation projects, as can be seen in the Results section, as well as encouraging discussion between agents who had not previously interacted with each other (students, professors, art educators, health professionals, museums, and more).

Lastly, once these objectives have been achieved, it is essential to reflect on the sustainability of a collaboration of this kind by addressing this last objective, which is set out in the discussion section of this paper.

Developing these projects requires a huge coordination and cooperation effort between the two institutions involved and all the collaborating agents working in them, as can be seen in the following section. As pointed out in the description of the second objective, one of the advantages of incorporating university students as creators and executors of this type of project, as part of their practical placements, is the possibility of including an academic tutor (in this case from the Faculty of Fine Arts) and a placements manager (a professional from *Madrid Salud*). This structure has driven the projects and enabled them to be run taking several aspects into account at the same time, as well as facilitating a highly productive interdisciplinary dialogue (Ávila et al, 2016). Dialogues have focused on *health promotion and prevention aspects* (responding to the objectives of the *Madrid Salud* Health Promotion and Prevention Service), on *artistic aspects* (responding to students' creative and artistic interests), and on *social and community aspects* (responding to the needs of the groups and individuals taking part in the projects). Finally, we had a discussion around *academic and research aspects* that enabled monitoring reports to be produced, and projects to be documented, which students have been able to use as academic and research material.

## Results

The results obtained over the course of the last five years can be found on a special website produced jointly by both institutions:

<https://www.ucm.es/artesaludproyectos/>. This electronic resource contains the summaries and articles, publications and activities arising out of all the community projects based on art and health, as well as input from all the agents involved in each one of them.

## Discussion

Considering art as a tool for effecting social change through community projects seems to be a reality, confirmed by what has been achieved over more than 5 years of collaboration between these two institutions. The collaboration between the Faculty of Fine Arts at the Complutense University of Madrid and Madrid City Council's *Madrid Salud* Service has put in place a whole network of potential collaboration, in which cultural and arts agents, social agents, and health professionals, have been able to actively take part in *community projects based on art and health*, in which participants have shared experiences, time and knowledge. In all these projects, art has been a catalyst, a generator of experiences very different to those available in the normal social lives of many participants (access to cultural life in Madrid, museum visits, taking part in workshops on artistic techniques, dialogue through art, and so on).

We can find community projects based on art all around the world. *InspireArt*, for example, is a network dedicated to increasing awareness about community and activist art initiatives in Montreal, using creative expression to build healthy communities. The *National Endowment for the Arts* (in United States) is an independent agency that funds, promotes, and strengthens the creative capacity of communities by providing all the people with diverse opportunities for arts participation. And *Community Arts Network* (CAN) Project (in United State too) promotes art made as a voice



and a force within a specific community of place, spirit or tradition. But what undoubtedly makes these kinds of community projects meaningful is that the impetus or driving force comes not only from the university or from the cultural or health institutions, but also from the community actually taking part in the projects, from the group of people and individuals who form part of them and participate in them.

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