



## Conference Paper

# Art Education in the Regions: Modernization Perspectives

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**Abstract**

The article explores the position of art education under the conditions of the unfolding processes of modernization and reform. The author highlights key features in the development of art education as a specialized system of training creative professionals. Using the data provided by the survey of professional teachers working in the higher art education in Chelyabinsk region, the author describes the problems and perspectives faced by the regional art education.

**Keywords:** culture, cultural policy, art education, modernization

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## 1. Introduction

The topic of this article is the reflection on the modernization of contemporary art education and the way this process is interpreted by those engaged in education. Modernization and reform are the words that in public consciousness are firmly connected not so much with the renewal and improvement, but, if not necessarily with a deterioration, then with uncertainty, instability and the erosion of certainties. Today the problems of modernization, reform and a general reorganization of Russian education in general, and art education in particular, is one of the most vital and highly contended topics [3, 5-7].

These problems facilitate serious discussions, as well as inspire open letters and an acknowledgement that previously brand-name art and culture institutions provide inefficient training. All of these reforms side effects are justified by its goal: the modernization itself whose ideological meaning is in updating and improving the previous system, creating a framework for its effective and sustainable development, and reaching a new quality of national education system.

For a long time, Russian system of art education was perceived to be the most result-oriented and efficient, providing high export rates of educational services and



job placement both in Russia and abroad. Generally, this system was considered to be unquestionably unique. This does not mean that this system did not require any improvements or modernization. Rather, the point is that modernization processes have to develop taking into account his system's particular characteristics.

## 2. Modernization Processes in the Art Education System

These characteristics are generally based on the indispensable and necessary **continuity between different levels of art education** which is based on staged development. Pre-school and supplementary educational institutions for children (music schools, aesthetic schools, art schools) form the basis for future professional education; they are its backbone and foundation. The next stage is the secondary-level professional schools which provide their graduates with a choice: they can either choose to work in their profession or continue studying at the next level. Finally, professional institutions of higher education provide their graduates with a degree and an opportunity to follow up their studies with the professional assistantship/internship.

Another important pre-condition required for an art education system to work is **an efficient development of the local creative environment**, which includes a network of artistic and cultural institutions that, first of all, serve as the potential and actual employers (without such employers, professional training loses its meaning and vital importance) and, second, create a new type of consumers who subsequently may decide to choose art education for their future.

Therefore, development perspectives of art education system are provided by a sustainable and reproducible situation where people enter the sphere of art and culture (following early aesthetic education). Later, this system should be sustained on all levels. This is the process through which a multi-level and multi-specialty educational and training aesthetic system is formed. The main goal of this system is **to create a unified artistic and educational space** based in the integration between elementary, secondary, higher and adult education.

Another characteristic of art education is a long, continuing and more or less never-ending character of this process. It includes not only new knowledge and skills, and their practical application, but also a deep inner personal development. This feature of art education makes it insecure and vulnerable, impossible to evaluate based on strict rules or universal efficiency criteria. These characteristics of art education are often interpreted as 'flawed', dependent and inferior compared to the education system in general. Examples of such attitude can be easily found in the titles of media articles

about the reforms in art education: 'The 'Step-daughter' of Russian Education System', 'Raise Your Voice for the Poor Culture...', 'Dependent on Subsidies', 'Save Money on Art!' etc.

Under the conditions created by modernization, image positioning becomes particularly important for art education. On the one hand, Russians traditionally perceive artistic – and cultural – potential of the country as a matter of national pride. This, however, indicates only a *potential* importance of this resource. The *realities* of the contemporary situation paint another picture: the status of people engaged in artistic culture and art education is reduced to a role of 'reluctant opportunist' and a socially unsuccessful actor. The salaries (the most important image factor) in this sphere are the lowest among the economic industries. Facilities and resources of many institutions of art and art education fall far below contemporary standards and demands of the contemporary consumers who do not want to be associated with a backward sphere and, therefore, prefer to keep their distance.

This problem is particularly pressing in the context of modernization: to be relevant, art education has to be perceived (and actually be!) modernized and contemporary, attractive from the point of view of its image. However, reforms in artistic culture and art education almost always lead to the reductions in funding and other support measures, which produces an unquestionably negative impact on its image.

### 3. Problematic Aspects in the Development of Regional Art Education

Since 2012, the Ministry of Culture of the Chelyabinsk region has been commissioning annual sociological surveys with a goal to discover problematic areas in the development of cultural area [1, 2].

Here we use the results of one of such surveys (conducted using a structured interview) that took place in 2017 among the teachers working in the Chelyabinsk institutions of higher education specializing in artistic and aesthetic subjects (Chelyabinsk State Institute of Culture and South Ural State Institute of Arts). During the research, the experts focused on the following challenges in the region that hinder the realization of full potential of the Chelyabinsk regions' talented young people:

- uncertain job prospects in relevant professions for the graduates;
- undeveloped regional art market, underdeveloped regional infrastructure of art supply;

- inadequate state support of professional art, low level of income for professionals working in this area;
- the lack of systematic well-designed efforts in popularizing classic (and quality modern) artworks;
- the lack of symphonic orchestra in Chelyabinsk, which could have employed the best graduates of musical faculties simultaneously raising appreciation of high culture in the region.
- an strongly pronounced pyramid structure of art field: there are almost no professional jobs in this area, or they are severely underpaid;
- underdeveloped urban social environment that could potentially raise the prestige of art professions.

Professional community proposed further recommendations to improve the conditions of career orientation and career choice for young people studying in creative fields (in education, job prospects for graduates, general working conditions of artistic and cultural institutions).

- in education: raise the salaries of art teachers, increase the amount of state-funding students in art disciplines (including regional financing), making these places non-personalized. Radically decrease the bureaucratic burden faced by the educational institutions in creating new documentation.
- in regional art environment: stimulate the private sector's interest in art education and artistic production. Create fund-raising agencies and a system of expert consulting to provide the members of the private sector with guidance within the art sphere.
- increase the number and diversity of art competitions of various levels that could motivate children to continue their art education (taking an example of sport);
- radically enlarge high-level art infrastructure: such cities as Chelyabinsk should have their own symphonic orchestras, wind bands, and experimental art teams (in every city district).

## 4. Conclusions

In conclusion, it is important to note the following. The axis of the development of the more efficient system of art education is the closer collaboration and improved partner relationships between art and culture systems, different segments of professional

community, government institutions and other participants in artistic and aesthetic process [4]. The use of integrative approach may help to optimize quality training of future creative professionals facilitating early specialization and professionalization of the students.

To sum up, it is important to remember that art education should not try to ignore general modernization processes unfolding in the education area. However, to participate in these processes more efficiently and to achieve quality results, it is important to preserve a balance between **sensitivity to changes** and **stability vector** in art education practices. That is, to 'keep afloat', it is necessary to track all modernization trends and reforms (which is unavoidable); on the other hand, to take efforts to protect the unique **traditions** of Russian art education, making sure they are not destroyed by the innovations.

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