

## Conference Paper

# Humanistic Education to Foster Altruistic Communities through Arts & Culture

**Harian Cho**

Ph.D. Candidate, Researcher, Department of Science of Arts, Chung-Ang University, Seoul, Republic of Korea

**Abstract**

Twentieth-century education was focused on knowledge transmission, skills and integration into society. This tradition often neglected the teaching of morals and altruism, which derive from collectivism, individualism, and social issues. However, community-building through shared experiences, empathy and responsibility are supremely important values that help to overcome many challenges in today's world. Socially engaged art has already a good practical track record: it has been playing a significant role in fostering altruistic communities for the last twenty years. Socially engaged art is a practical outdoor activity that has proactive, educational and moral value. It is carried out by activists, community builders and some of teachers in the field. In this article I review several projects in socially engaged art in modern Republic of Korea that focus on creativity, empathy, recycling and social responsibility. These projects highlight the value of socially engaged art and its potential for taking education outdoors and bringing communities together.

Corresponding Author:

Harian Cho

hariancho@gmail.com

Published: 25 August 2020

Publishing services provided by  
Knowledge E**Keywords:** socially engaged art, social welfare, social practice, community art

© Harian Cho. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use and redistribution provided that the original author and source are credited.

Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the Questions of Expertise in Culture, Arts and Design Conference Committee.

## 1. Introduction

Education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century throughout the world has been focusing on passing knowledge, acquiring technology and integrating people into society. It has forgotten about teaching morals and altruism, which derive from collectivism, individualism, and social issues. The phenomenon is that the modern society has become a stepping stone for being successful and getting a better position on the job market. Sharing experiences and encouraging empathy within communities are easily unnoticed. Socially engaged art has played significant role in fostering altruistic communities for the last 20 years. Practical education outdoors is being carried out by activists, community builders and some of teachers in the field.

## 2. Discussion

 OPEN ACCESS

## **2.1. Humanistic education could be practiced in communities by town residence.**

Humanistic education has existed in the academic studies and disciplines for centuries. Community builders are common people who are our neighbours and people on the street who have noticed issues and problems in their neighbourhood. Their motivation is usually derived from achieving their own comfort and making their environment better for life. Yet, these self-motivated acts can also strongly affect people around them, lead to the altruism without initiators' direct intention.

### **2.1.1. Controversies on Cat shelter maintained by Cat Mom and Cat Daddy.**

Cat Mom and Cat Daddy are coined words that were created by the Korean Public on the Internet. These coined words mean women and men who give food to street cats in cities where there is not enough food to be found except trash bags. Cat Moms and Cat Daddies claim that the action of giving food to street cats reduce their behaviour of looting trash bags. Others claim that these behaviours attract cats from other territories to the feeding area, which increase its population in the area. It could be the cause of the unpredictable accidents and conflict between neighbours. Some argue that if Cat Moms and Cat Daddies volunteer to feed street cats, they should also give medical care and pick up cats' dung as if they were house pets. By doing so, cats would not spread viruses or germs to neighbourhood and would maintain hygiene in the coexisting area. Cat Moms and Cat Daddies claim cats kill rats in the city but there is not enough evidence to prove it. During summer season, some of Cat Moms and Cat Daddies do not take care of their feeding spot well enough. It causes cat food to go rotten and produce stench in the neighbourhood. All these factors cause constant conflict between Cat Moms-Cat Daddies and neighbours.

### **2.1.2. Compassion leads to creativity**

Apart from the controversies of Cat Moms-Cat Daddies, the way they care for street cats and their passion makes feeding shelters increasingly better. Feeding cats on daily bases, they have to confront different seasons, weather, and unexpected difficulties. Accumulated problems and issues that they face turn into creativity to make the shelters more convenient and efficient.

Compassion towards street cats develops into designing more efficient cat shelters. A simple box and food can't survive the rainy and snowy weather. Through long discussion in online communities, Cat Moms-Cat Daddies came up with an idea of covering the box with vinyl cloth so that the box containing cat food does not get wet. Strong wind and storm forced them to strengthen the shelter box with heavy bricks. To prevent infestation of pest and insects, coarse salt is spread around the box. These enhancements are made through the online discussions and the first-hand experiences. Each shelter is installed in different areas around the country and has its own characteristics adapting to the environment.

## **2.2. Teachers can be active educators.**

One of the active teaching methods that art educators are interested in today is interdisciplinary teaching. Boundaries between subjects and studies are fading away. Crossing over to other subject areas helps layered thinking. These tendencies appear in arts as active teaching methods that set such goals as to share with, to understand, and to help others. Combined humanistic education and art education created a new subject, teaching altruism to students.

### **2.2.1. Carrot Project**

Online flea market application called "Carrot market" was launched in 2015. It is a flea market system that connects a user with neighbours after validating one's location. The market allows the users to deal with people within 2~6 kilometres from your location. For the last few years, 3,000,000 people downloaded mobile application and 1,200,000 people are using the application monthly.

The main difference with the existing online flea markets is dealing with people one could bump into on the street, supermarket and public places. The idea of a flea market is to make profit by selling items that a person does not have use for. In Carrot market, we find an unusual phenomenon of giving useful things away for free. This action is called "Share for free". When anonymous users turn into actual people living in the neighbourhood, people give up making profit and share. These actions of kindness somehow stimulate more response and growth among the users.

### 2.2.2. From recycling to upcycling

'Share for free' items from Carrot market have been collected for 16 to 17-year old students at Kaywon High School of Arts from August 1<sup>st</sup> to December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018. Various household items like children toys, clothes, wooden shelves and others were given for free over months. A class was held for a semester, two hours a week for 34 hours in total, during which 14 students came up with creative ideas to upcycling.

Stained and old wooden plant stand was turned into a brand-new painting with a beautiful hand. It was painted in acrylic colour and took about 20 hours to be finished. When the stand was posted online as a 'Share for free' item, there were 8 people who asked for it. It was given to the person who asked first in the community.

Useless wooden toy blocks became an attractive children play table. In Korea, there is a very strict waste sorting system. Metal, food, plastic, glass, paper can go to free sorting system, but all the others should be put into general sorting bags that cost 1.5 dollars per a bag. Throwing away wooden items costs more than a bag. Bigger things like wooden furniture need more expensive stickers that can be bought in public offices and community centre. Wooden toys are a trouble for mothers when their children are done playing with them. They do not want to pay for a few sorting bags to throw them away. These wooden toys are expensive, even when they purchase them from shops. Getting 'share for free' wooden toys for several weeks, three students started making a play table, transforming simple wooden blocks into a toy castle.

Rubber toy became an interior fish-shaped mood lamp. Rubber toy is transparent for lights. A student found the use of the material and made a fish shaped ball. The light bulb that produces colour on the wall was inserted later.

Furthermore, there are doll house made of a trashed seasoning shelf, old hand-painted flowery box from an old bread box and more. These upcycled items were posted in carrot market for free in December 2018. About 35 people asked for these, and the items were given to seven people in the neighbourhood for free. Thus things that were given for free were transformed into something useful and given back to people who need them.

## 3. Conclusions

Humanistic education can be both direct and indirect. Education through art and culture that put neighbours first instead of prioritizing personal profit is one of the ways to activate local communities. Despite controversies of Cat Moms-Cat Daddies, their

compassion leads them to be creative through experience and dialogue. Developing and adjusting shelters in their own communities is for them an ongoing project without any benefit for themselves. Some of Cat Moms-Cat Daddies pay for medical bills for street cats with disease. Some of them become activists by rescuing street cats and campaigning for adoption. These cases show creativity that comes with compassion and altruism for others. As for the 'upcycling project', it was initiated under the school system, and not voluntarily. However, it has not only taught teenage students what creativity can do, but also showed to the community that what they do not need can become art.

## References

- [1] Craig, G. (2011). *The Community Development Reader: History, Themes, and Issues*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- [2] Helguera, P. (2011). *Education for Socially Engaged Art*. New York: Jorge Pinto Books.
- [3] Schwarzman, M. (2009). *Beginner's Guide to Community-Based Arts*. New York: New Village Press.
- [4] Thompson, N. (2012). *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press.