



Filmmakers' Perceptions of Post-Secondary Education: Lithuanian Case

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Abstract

This study investigates the perceptions that Lithuanian animation, live-action and documentary filmmakers have towards post-secondary education, specifically whether top-tier Lithuanian filmmakers consider higher education as a distinctive and superior format or just one of the many ways to acquire professional skills and knowledge necessary for their creative career. The researchers employed a quantitative research approach and analyzed data from filmmakers' CVs that were submitted to the Lithuanian Film Centre. Study revealed that today alarming number of Lithuanian filmmakers working in industry's top positions does not seek post-secondary education. With the information obtained from our study, authors suggest that post-secondary education in art in Lithuania would adjust their communication strategy towards students and the industry to convey the relevance of this type of education.

1. Introduction

The concept of education in art is as old as the system of apprenticeship. However, the concept of education of art in post-secondary education has been around only for five centuries [1]. And in that time this concept (or more precisely – the curriculum) changed drastically many times. The fact that the model of PhD in arts was possible only from the 1990s [2] shows how recent our current system of post-secondary education in art is. Furthermore, with the rise of the concept of creative industries in the beginning of 21st century the curriculum at learning institutions has changed as well. The contemporary art curriculum is increasingly focused on entrepreneurial forms of artishood [3] and “justifications for making art are more likely to be money and fame” [4]. Thus, the definition of what higher education in art is (or should be) is constantly changing and evolving.

However, although the concept of post-secondary education in art is intangible, there should be a clear difference between education acquired from post-secondary education and the acquisition of knowledge and skills by other means. In other words, there should be a clear distinction between a person *with a degree* and *without*, especially now when access to

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art education is not limited by social status, gender or patronage censorship system [5]. Most countries even provide state scholarships for the “best and brightest”. Thus, with some basic “talent” and skills one has a chance to study art (painting, sculpture, architecture, music, film, photography, video production/editing, design, and etc.) in a post-secondary institution that provides art related academic degrees. The question becomes – why should one do it?

The challenges that higher education institutions face in the 21st century are quite widely analyzed and described in numerous academic articles, monographs, national and international government commissioned studies. The situation in the context of art in post-secondary education is equally widely discussed. Thus, there are many strategies that suggested how to construct art curriculum, how to recruit and manage staff, how to evaluate students, what new technologies to implement and what aspects and values to promote so that the future of higher education in art will flourish. However, there are very few studies that delve into perception and views of graduates from art studies. Furthermore, most of those studies are from Anglo-Saxon countries, where government forms did not undergo radical changes in the last century, economic status of the countries were mostly stable and prosperous and cultural and creative economic sectors were well established. Thus, research presented in this paper about how professionals of the audiovisual creative field perceive the curriculum of post-secondary education should provide valuable insight to government and institution level policy-makers of smaller countries, especially from the post-Soviet region.

This paper is structured as follows: Firstly, the authors will briefly introduce the concept of post-secondary education in art. Then the authors will examine how the purpose of post-secondary art education has evolved in last 50 years, especially in the context of globalization and the digitalization of processes. Secondly, an outline of research and findings will be presented. Lastly, authors will conclude with a discussion of how the gathered data correlates with information in the reviewed literature, and what it reveals about post-secondary education institutions in art in Lithuania.

2. Literature Review

Before discussing the purpose and status of post-secondary art institution in art it is necessary to define few terms. We will begin with the term of “post-secondary education”. Although, post-secondary education institutions existed more than one thousand years ago, in context of our study there is no purpose to go beyond 1970s when the post-industrial revolution forced society to go through a radical transformation from industrial society to a knowledge-based one [5]. This event forced the notion of the importance of post-secondary education for the development and prosperity of the nation. Thus, the perception of post-secondary education as the key solution to national economic, social and cultural development was cemented.

However, with the rise of globalization and the digitalization of processes in the 1990s so has risen the need to re-evaluate the role of post-secondary education. Although degree is still considered an essential

element for most careers, not all post-secondary education institutions are equally prestigious. The internationalization process of scholars, students, knowledge and curriculums [6] forced many institutions (that were losing the competitive fight) to re-think their position in the market and adapt new strategies.

In other words, many higher education institutions are now faced with the unescapable fact, that in the 21st century universities, colleges and academies no longer compete locally but instead globally. Institutions, especially in the EU, no longer compete within one state, but with every university, college or academy in the continent. Thus, because of continuous student emigration, not only are there fewer graduates each year who enroll into local higher education institutions, but it is also a brain drain of young talent to countries like Canada, USA, Australia, United Kingdom and France [7].

However, it is important to note, that every country has different challenges in their respective educational system. For example, Czech Republic has unique challenges with the participation of adults in lifelong education [8]. Estonia is facing challenges with ageing teaching staff and future shortage of qualified teachers [9]. And the USA is confronting continuous decreases in international student enrollment [10]. Thus, although there are common trends in global higher education, one should always avoid generalization of trends and challenges in global education systems.

The second term is “art” and in this paper it is used broadly and includes disciplines like fine art, (audio) visual art, design and etc. In other words, term “art” means that students in post-secondary education institutions are studying subjects that, although require knowledge and skills to perform, is not repetitive (there is necessity for artistic novelty in every executed creative project).

This field of study comes with unique set of challenges. First of all Fine Art (along with the Humanities and Biology) is at a disadvantage, since many areas of work that are potentially open to graduates of this discipline require further study or training [11]. A study in UK revealed that almost three quarters ($\frac{3}{4}$) of creative graduates had undertaken some form of further study, education or training since graduating [12]. Just to be considered for enrolment to post-secondary education institution of art students must produce an additional portfolio of artwork for assessment [13]. Thus, the career path requires substantial time (among other resources) invested into continuous development of skills and knowledge in order to stay competitive in the market.

Therefore, creative graduates often face another great challenge – employment after graduation. Various studies show that for creative graduates formal qualifications from higher education institution are far less important than their personal portfolio [14] [15]. Thus, creative graduates often have the worst employability statistics among other disciplines.

Lastly there are specific challenges when forming creative curriculum at post-secondary education institutions in art. There is a need for much broader understanding from creative students than simply acquiring technical skill as was raised by Walt Disney himself in his famous memo written in 1935 to Don Graham (art teacher from Chounaird Art Institute)

about structured a training program for new animators [16]. Interestingly, Disney's memo foreshadowed a professional curriculum approach in post-secondary education in art. However, his outlined holistic approach to curriculum for animators is impossible without (i) substantial investment into infrastructure and (ii) experienced and adequate pedagogues.

Today art-based universities and colleges have to invest in physical infrastructure that allows them to conduct exhibitions, rehearsals, technical workshops and creative productions [17]. The key challenge is extremely the rapid depreciation of software and hardware. In other words, higher education institutions that want to provide and maintain industry level hardware and software tools for the creative students may actually have to annually invest more than institution can recoup from tuition fees. Thus, various studies record that creative graduates are often dissatisfied with the skills they receive from their alma mater [15] [18]. Furthermore, as one study in Lithuania revealed the animation industry is not satisfied with the overall level of new animation graduates [19]. This problem is supported by other studies showing that very high percentage of creative graduates do not enter a 'creative' occupation not only in the short-term period, but also in the medium-to-long-period [20] [21] [15].

A second challenge involves post-secondary art institutions' ability to attract competent and experienced teachers. This task is not an easy one. First of all, in most countries there are formal requirements that, in order for one to become lecturer at post-secondary institution, one need to have a master's degree [19]. Secondly, most post-secondary education institutions in art are funded by government and thus cannot even come close to offer a salary that would match what top tier creatives can get in industry. This creates a peculiar situation where lecturers are asked to prepare students for a job which is paid better than the lecturers' job. And finally, simply not every experienced creative worker can be an effective teacher. Thus, not every creative professional can construct and execute effectively on the curriculum.

Therefore, it is not surprising that with the rise of digitalization and globalization online non-formal education courses and workshop have begun to gain huge popularity among people that want to pursue a creative career. In the field of animation online schools like "Animation Mentor" are proving to be very successful informal education institutions with alumni in over 105 countries [22].

Thus, if an informal education institution can be as effective (or even better) than a formal education institution to provide necessary skills and knowledge for young talents to successfully enter the market, so the most important question becomes are there any aspects in post-secondary institutions that are superior to informal education institutions from a young talent perspective?

John H. Newman [23] argued that the purpose of university education is to obtain a free, equitable, calm, moderate and wise mind. Lairio, Puukari, and Kouvo [24] argue that universities should teach students how to continue to reflect upon, shape, adapt and develop their identities throughout their lifespan. In the context of creative post-secondary institutions Bridgstock and Cunningham argue that programs should

include, but move beyond, skill-based curricula to engage critically with the creative workforce's issues and develop higher-level management and self-management capabilities, thus helping to sustain the many graduates when faced with the challenges in building creative careers [25]. Thus, in simplistic terms, post-secondary education institution in art should not only provide one with a trade, but also much more. It is, after all, an alma mater – *nourishing mother* – thus a few constituents are more important to an institution than its alumni [26].

However, a survey [27] conducted among professional animators revealed that most of them recommend for new talents to create high quality demo reel (51%) in order for those new talents to successfully get a first job. Followed by a recommendation to build strong industry connections (19%), and only 11% recommended to complete education at a reputable art or animation school. Thus, only 1/10 of representatives from industry believe that post-secondary education is essential for a creative worker.

In the age of globalization, where most knowledge is easily assessable and an extensive spectrum of practical creative skills can be acquired via digital communication do post-secondary institutions in art still have monopoly on students identity development? Especially, if creative graduates do not seem to recognize this aspect of their respective alma maters. This question becomes even more important in the context of the global pandemic of 2020, where most universities, colleges and academies are forced to provide their activities remotely.

Finally, this paper requires to take a quick overview of the concept of curriculum vitae (CV; from Latin “course of life”). In the simplest terms CV is an overview and summary of person's professional and personal life [28]. This type of documents serves as the generally accepted communication device for professionals to prove that they should be considered for the position they want, to acquire desired funding, or to attain any other wanted outcome.

And although, presenting one's achievement seems like a straight forward task, the countless tutorials of all kinds on this topic show that CV writing is a really difficult art to master. And, it is import to note that although there are some loose guidelines and recommendations for how one's CV should look, there are no rules set in stone. Thus, CV is perfect tool in order to analyze how professionals perceive and communicate different aspects of their experience.

3. Empirical Study

A two stage approach was designed to achieve the objectives of the research reported in this paper. Each of two methodology stages is outlined, as follows:

- Review of filmmakers' CVs provided to LFC in order to apply for state support for a cinematic (animation, live-action or documentary) project. Filmmakers CVs were acquired by one of the authors of this paper by serving as a member in national Film board in LFC (2017-2018 cadence).
- Authors sent inquiries to representatives of Lithuanian post-secondary education institutions in order to determine their perception of the situation.

The LFC rules for applying for state support say that all key creative members that are attached to a cinematic project at the time of application must provide their resume of creative achievements. Thus, the authors had access to many CVs of the five key creative members: *director*, *script-writer*, *director of photography*, *composer* and *production designer* operating in the animation, live-action and documentary fields.

A total of 118 film projects (which have passed the administrative selection) were provided to the Film Council during the term. Because cinematic projects can be submitted at two different production stages (preproduction and production) not all projects had all key creatives attached. Also, foreign nationality filmmakers that were part of the cinematic project were excluded from this study. Finally, as a number of film projects had the same professionals attached, a total of 197 unique Lithuanian filmmakers' CVs were obtained. With a preliminary review technique, data is created. After analyzing all unique CVs, the following categories of data were extracted:

- Did filmmakers obtained education in Lithuania or abroad;
- Did filmmakers receive education during the USSR era;
- How many CVs clearly indicated the filmmaker's education (alma mater, level of degree, year of diploma, name of program);
- How many filmmakers had a master's degree;
- How many filmmakers have PhD;

The data collected allowed the authors to determine the current patterns. On the basis of the data collected, inquiries were sent via e-mail to Lithuanian higher education institutions, which produced alumni that do not consider that obtained higher education degree to be different (superior) from the knowledge and skills gained during short-term seminars or workshops. E-mails considered this information: (a) introduction, (b) research context and goals, and (c) four questions concerning patterns identified in the study. However, because none of the institutions replied, this paper will not present or discuss findings from Lithuanian post-secondary education institutions. Although, it is important to notice that inquiry was sent out to all Lithuanian higher education institutions just before national quarantine lockdown, thus, it is possible that institutions' representatives did not get the chance or simply found this study a low priority in face of new and unplanned challenges.

4. Findings

The study revealed that only 55% of all CVs clearly stated their alma mater, degree level and year of graduation, and name of programme. Additionally, filmmakers did not present informal education as having the same value as post-secondary education.

16% of CVs had some shortcomings when stating information about higher education. For example, CVs presenting filmmaker's alma mater, there was no indication of what level of degree was received. In some cases next to indication of alma mater there were also information of

faculty and general study direction. In other cases CVs did not provide information about when the filmmaker completed his or her degree. Finally, there were cases where the filmmaker simply stated in their CV „I finished [name of the institution]“ without providing any additional information about filmmaker’s formal education.

22% of all Filmmakers’ CVs presented informal education as having the same value as post-secondary education. In other words (a) presenting summer schools as formal education or (b) presenting internship as formal education. In some cases the filmmakers even present extra curricular activities at school as part of their formal education.

7% of all Filmmakers’ CVs failed to identify any higher education degree. In these cases, CVs presented only information about previous projects that the filmmaker was attached to in any capacity (filmography).

The study also revealed that less than 27% of all key filmmaking positions have a master’s degree. However, it is interesting to note that out of all filmmakers that did have a master’s degree, 17% had a non-audiovisual field’s degree. In other words, among filmmakers who were attached to projects that were aiming to secure state support almost one fifth come from such disciplines like archaeology, law, anthropology, IT, journalism, management and so on.

Only 2% of all filmmakers had a PhD. However, two of these PhD were in a field of music, one in philosophy and one in anthropology. Thus, between 2017 and 2018 not a single filmmaker with a PhD in cinematic arts had a key position in animation, live-action or documentary project that was trying to secure state support.

The data also revealed that 14% of all CVs belong to filmmakers that had at least one of their higher education degrees in Soviet Union times. And 11% of analysed CVs belonging to filmmakers that had at least one degree from foreign university.

5. Discussions

Today the concept of art higher education is still going through changes that started in the 1970s when engage-in-new-ideas replaced the old producing-artefacts curriculum [1]. Therefore, because of these changes for the last couple decades it is possible to pursue PhD in arts. However, although, conceptual approach to art education is still valued for the last couple decades there is growing demand for professional curriculum.

This shift in demand for post-secondary art curriculum (and even pedagogy) once again is forcing institutions to adapt to a new reality and search for new strategies for, not only, how to stay relevant but also how to survive in truly global competition. Furthermore, this competition no longer involves only other post-secondary education institutions in art but also informal education institution in art.

The analysis of CVs of the most prominent Lithuanian filmmakers suggests that almost half of professionals (especially younger ones) do not perceive post-secondary education as the exclusive and unparalleled method to gain knowledge and skills. In other words, animation, live-action and documentary filmmakers feel that prestigious workshops and other

type of informal education have as much or even more weight in influencing document readers. This is in line with literature that suggests that, for creative graduates, portfolio is much more important than formal education. Furthermore, the need for creative workers to continually invest into the development of new skills naturally devalues formal education.

Also findings suggest that curriculum (especially at masters level) are not perceived as essential for the career in the industry. Only one third (1/3) of top tier filmmakers continued their post-secondary education. Furthermore, substantial number of all analyzed filmmakers with this level of degree had their master's degree in different fields. It is important to note, that in Lithuania master's degrees in the audiovisual field is constructed to enhance skills and knowledge of filmmakers who are planning to occupy top tier positions, thus if other tier filmmakers would be included into the study, it is very likely that that percentage would drop considerably.

However, it is crucial to take into account the fact that some filmmakers are graduates of the Soviet era. Firstly, for creative graduates of that era there were no possibilities to have master's degree in arts as we understand it today. Not to mention to hold a PhD degree in arts. Secondly, this group of filmmakers finished their education 30 plus years ago, thus naturally have significantly larger filmographies (hence professional prestige) than any other group and arguably, are least concerned about providing accurate information about their formal education in a document format that emerged much later in their lives.

Interestingly, no top tier filmmakers in the sample had PhD in audiovisual arts. This can be explained that only very few PhD are awarded from 2010 when this degree was first introduced by Lithuanian post-second institutions. Further research in this matter revealed that at the moment there is only one PhD awarded in cinematic (live-action) field [29] and none in the fields of animation or documentary.

This data is somewhat alarming, because PhD are awarded for producing original research that expands the boundaries of knowledge, thus without pedagogues that have extensive knowledge on the topic of audiovisual arts and exceptional research skills post-secondary institutions without question will lack in the ability to shape creative students minds to be able to analyze independently and to pursue innovative ways of approaching creative work. Thus, the fact that in over 10 years, Lithuanian post-secondary art institutions have been unable to attract its master's degree alumni to pursue third-level studies is upsetting because no other field can supplement with researchers for PhD studies in the cinematic arts.

Finally, it is interesting to note, that one tenth of top tier Lithuanian filmmakers of the sample have at least one degree from foreign countries. This signals that globalization process is truly affecting the national film industry. Of course, it is far too early to evaluate how this aspect of globalization process will affect Lithuanian film industry and its creative outcomes, but this data may be useful for future studies on this topic.

This study suggests that at this point Lithuanian post-secondary art institutions face not only an identity crisis, but also need to prepare new strategies in order to survive new trends in the market. However, it is impor-

tant to point out that crisis in higher education in art is a global phenomenon, thus challenges that universities, colleges and academies in Lithuania are facing are not cultural. Nonetheless, the question of sustainability and the relevance of post-secondary art education at this point in history is fundamental. In other words, times have changed and curriculum in formal education has to be not only well balance but also evident as beneficial to potential students' future creative careers and personal development. Thus, it is essential that post-secondary education institutes in art prepare and execute adequate communication strategies to assure target audience (future creative students) that the institution's curriculum is constructed to prepare creative graduates for entry into the labor market.

It is important to note, that the authors of this paper do not aim to support or oppose any curriculum, value system or particular post-secondary art institution. Rather, this study aims to provide additional data that would help to make an informed decision for education policy-makers and institution administrators how to adapt to challenges of globalization and digitalization.

However, the authors argue that, as it was for the last five centuries, there will always be challenges when trying to balance curriculum of art education with need to provide students with skills, knowledge and the skills of critical assessment versus creative expression and experimentation. Thus, the goal is not to find a perfect equilibrium, but rather implement tools that would allow relatively quick changes in curriculum, strategic goals and infrastructure (especially hardware and software).

6. Conclusions

The ability to identify trends, shifts in demand, new possibilities and react to that knowledge are the most valuable skills today. This is not only true in the education sector. Furthermore, conservatism (or inability to change fast enough) in 21st century is a fast track to obscurity. Therefore, post-secondary education institutions in art do not have to construct a strategy to find ideal curriculum, but to implement tools that would enable them to adapt curriculum to new necessities as fast as possible.

This study revealed that top tier filmmakers are subject to global trends in the creative sector and feel that for their continuous professional advancement there is a need to have continuous skill development. However, findings suggest that at the moment there is significant devaluation of the prestige of formal education among Lithuanian filmmakers.

In any case, it is up to post-secondary education institutions in art to choose a path to the future. But, one has to remember that government funded institutions in art do have the option to choose vegetation.

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