

Art in Peace-Building: Working with Paradoxes

Some sections of the opening speech of the forum "Art in Conflict", Zürich, May 26th 2015
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When we started with *artasfoundation* we wrote down our intentions. We knew, good intentions are dangerous things, they are the driving force of all tragedies..., but in the beginning this was what we had.

If we were to characterise our work now, we would do it in a very different way: We'd say that our work, for example art projects in war affected regions of the South Caucasus, consists of struggling with paradoxes. It is like balancing on a tight-rope of contradictions. Here are some of them:

- We initiate projects for communities, WHILE at the same time wanting to promote self-initiative.
- We address people with certain categories (names of conflicting groups, ethnic groups, displaced persons...), WHILE at the same time wanting to reduce the relevance of these categories.
- We criticise the "war industry" WHILE at the same time contributing to a "peace industry" which finds its rationale in a booming industry of war.
- Much of the power of art may stem from the artist's ways of focusing on an issue without trying to determine a given outcome. We are well aware of this, WHILE at the same time expecting (inviting) the artists to contribute to the outcome of peace.
- We question the universality of (at least some of) our values and criticise euro-centric behaviour, WHILE at the same time wanting that our values are shared abroad. (Ideas, for example, about punctuality or attitudes to planning and improvisation, but not only.)
- We long for an even collaboration with our local "partners", a collaboration on equal footing", WHILE at the same time using our privileges (money, mobility...) to determine the rules for this collaboration - if not all rules, so at least the most basic ones.
- We know that one source of many conflicts and suffering in the "South" lies in the "North", in the interests and lifestyle of rich countries. So actually the social transformation would have to begin here. We know this, WHILE at the same time talking about social transformation in the "South".

These are heavy contradictions, but I think it would be wrong to try to escape them and run away from this kind of work, close down *artasfoundation*. Why? Because paradoxes are motors of change: of changes in our awareness and consciousness, and perhaps also of small changes in the world we meet. It is for this reason, that struggling with paradoxes will make our work not only difficult, but also fascinating. Our task may be to face and explore them and to respond to them in an ever more precise way. In this, I believe, we need to support each other.

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The text can also be downloaded from <http://www.artasfoundation.ch/en/reference-texts>