

Summer School of Dialogue, Borderland School 2013 - evaluation synthesis on the basis of evaluation questionnaires and oral/written feedback of participants

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1. Conditions:

a) accommodation

In general very positive overall evaluation (mainly 4,5). There was only one general reservation expressed in the majority of questionnaires – it would be better, if the whole group could stay in one place, preferably close to the working space. The group accommodated in Oficyna was complaining about overcrowded rooms.

b) food

In general rather positive overall evaluation – ranging usually from 4- to 5 and many very enthusiastic voices. Remarks usually on the veg option not considered enough or too much meat on the menu. There were also requests for more fruits and sweets.

c) workshop logistics

In general assessed very positively by the respondents (4,5). Some remarked on the program being too overloaded and very concentrated on work, neglecting the socializing factor. There was also a remark on too much workshops taking place inside.

d) transport

Good overall assessment (4-5), with few exceptions (2), the main reason for discontent being the lack of possibility to go home when desired (i.e. in the evenings earlier than the whole group or during the day in between the workshops to change or fetch something). But the majority praised punctuality and organization of transport, as well as helpfulness of the drivers.

e) time management

Assessed rather positive (4-5, some 3's). Some respondents appreciated its precision and consequence of execution. Others commented on not enough free time for reflecting on the content of the workshops and for informal interactions. There were respondents who remarked on some workshops lasting longer than in the schedule or the breaks being shortened in some cases.

f) communication (including languages)

Polarized opinions – the majority gave the highest rank, some explicitly praising the multi-language communication. Some respondents assessed this component low (2-3), stating that there were too many people who did not speak English. There was

even one explicit recommendation not to accept participants who cannot communicate in English. Some respondents related to communication problems in group work during the workshops.

2. Program structure

a) Presentation of Borderland's work

- Bożena Szroeder's presentation on work with children

Except very isolated cases, Bożena's presentation was awarded the highest possible rank, with comments appreciating her commitment and personal charisma as an animator.

- Michał Moniuszko's presentation on music projects

Was given mostly high grades (4-5) and was rated as very interesting and engaging with some exceptions, where the respondents complained about the poor clarity and coherence of the talk.

b) evening program

The opinions were polarized – while for the most part the respondents ranked it very highly regarding its content and role as a presentation of Borderland work, some lowered their assessment remarking it was too intensive/taking place too late/it was imposed on the whole group with no possibility of choosing. There appeared also suggestions of more time for informal interaction of the whole group/rest and postulates for more physical exercise, like dancing. There was also a remark on the necessity of engaging the group in common activities like singing for example.

c) debate with Timothy Snyder and Marci Shore

The debate was considered by most of the respondents as highly relevant. Some respondents suggested a different space (lighting and visibility conditions) or regretted that there was not more time for questions and discussion that would make the event more interactive.

d) digital presentation by Brendan Jackson

The respondents appreciated the professional and personal qualities of the presenter, as well as the variety of different examples he brought in. Some remarked nonetheless that his English was hard to understand.

e) participants' presentations

In general the respondents appreciated the interactive aspects of the presentation evening and its informative aspect. However, due to a big margin of freedom left by the organizers as to the shape of the presentations, they varied greatly in scope and content, which by some respondents was construed as lack of coherence. There was a suggestion for clearer guidelines for the preparation of the presentations and a

voice that a more informative content relating to the current situation of culture and civil society in a given country would be beneficial.

3. Workshops

a) How do you find the structure of Summer School of Dialogue - what do you value the most, what was missing?

For the most part, the overall structure of the Summer School of Dialogue was assessed very positively and described as balanced and well-planned. Among its most valued elements the respondents mentioned:

- high professional and personal qualities of the workshop leaders, who were well chosen for their tasks
- compliance of the program description with its actual execution
- usefulness and coherence of presented content, its relevance to participants' experiences
- diversity of methods used during different activities and workshops
- clear division of program components
- balanced dynamics between presentation of specific content and incorporating it into practice/ theoretical material and practical exercises
- variety of people and projects, international surrounding
- modes of communication

As areas for improvement the respondents mentioned:

- space/time for formal and informal interaction of participants - eating, common accommodation (suggestion for more ice-breaking and introduction activities on the first day to make people know each other better), free time
- time for physical energizing activities before the workshops
- more in-depth analysis of a given project (suggestion for less participants)
- shorter lectures based more on the expert's experience, more practice and tools-oriented activities, more interactive exercises
- suggestion for a common theme that would unite the structure and ensure more coherence between workshops

b) Did you find the program of the workshops useful for your own development and work? How?

All of the respondents indicated the program of workshops as relevant to their own development and work, underscoring its importance especially in the following areas:

- knowledge – the program brought in a lot of useful information that can be used in the participants' practice, like networking, funding, finding partners, project analysis, defining target group and audience (however, as remarked by some respondents, some new and complicated concepts, especially on Jean Pierre's and Krzysztof's part could be discussed deeper)

- skills: the program provided space for developing skills in the following areas: team work, project presentation, planning and structuring of projects, finding and communicating with partners, role of the animator
- values - the program enabled illustrating different values in cultural work and confronting them with the values brought in by the participants
- relations – the program enabled establishing new contacts
- consolidation of participants experiences, knowledge and skills with the new input and experience of the workshop leaders; one of the respondents described the program as “ideas incubator”

Some of the respondents also mentioned, that the way the Borderland School project is organized and structured has given them valuable insights and observations useful for their own work.

Only one respondent described the program as useful, but not enough revolutionary with regard to his/her expectations on how it could change his/her work.

c) What do you value the most about each workshop?

In general professionalism and qualifications of the workshop leaders were very much appreciated by the majority of respondents. Exceptionally valued was the high degree of involvement in their projects that the leaders presented, as well as the examples of the leaders’ own experience with cultural work. Many respondents underscored also the improvement of their presentation skills, that were developed during all the workshops. The interactivity of the workshops and their orientation on practice were assets very often praised by the respondents, but at the same time there were many pleas for more interactive methods of work (here arises a doubt, how the respondents understand ‘interactivity’ – some as more engagement of the participants and some as using more interactive media presentation of different projects) . Communicative style of teaching as well as easy and informal atmosphere during the workshops were also very much appreciated. In general the respondents praised the method of the group work and peer feedback, however some of them remarked it would be better to have a moderator of discussion in each group.

Some detailed remarks on individual workshops include:

I) Workshop of the animator by Kris Keulemans and Wilemijn Lamp – very much appreciated and highly valued for its method and content, the underscored points for praise included:

- rich feedback from the workshop leaders, useful practical advice
- concentration on each project separately, individual approach, deep understanding of each project
- good structure and division of material
- impulse to rethink projects
- clear presentation and logic – easy understanding

- possibility to get peer feedback and engage in peer-driven discussion, improving team-work skills
- sense of humor

As the main gain in knowledge and skills the respondents named usually the ability to plan the workshops step by step and structure it better.

Suggestions:

- some participants questioned the method of working all the time in the same group (for some it was hard to come to terms with their peers and some wanted to change between projects and people)
- pleas for richer illustration of the content - case studies to analyze, examples of successful projects done in reality

II) Workshop of the leader by Jean Pierre Deru and Ania Danilewicz

Jean Pierre was described as a unique coach – his deep understanding of global cultural situation and interesting input he gave were much appreciated, although there were some suggestions to shorten the lectures and at the same time deepen some of the presented issues by discussion with participants. Ania's practical studies were described as very useful and her practical advice much appreciated. The respondents appreciated in particular:

- diversity and complexity of program
- different forms of work (role-play very much appreciated)
- intensive experience
- interesting information (e.g. about potential funding and partners)
- good division of roles
- combination of practice and theory
- real work on the projects

Suggestions:

- more participants involvement, even in the lecture part

III) Workshop of the Borderland by Krzysztof Czyżewski – generally described as very interesting, introducing a new and fresh approach to cultural work. The workshop was described as:

- source of inspiration (concept of the Borderland)
- deepening the sense of history and narrativity in cultural work
- giving impulse for rethinking the vision and reason of the projects and how they are intertwined in local history
- space for discussion

Suggestions:

From suggestions of the participants a general conclusion can be drawn, that it could be worth increasing the number of working hours of this workshop to the participants give an opportunity better assimilate the new information and to discuss more examples from the actual programs and methods of work in the Borderland.

- greater participants' involvement in discussion after introducing a new concept

d) What would you improve in the workshop content and its method of work?

Some of the general suggestions for improvement/desired elements of the workshops included:

- clearer presentation, key-points and instructions for exercises written/charted in a form of a diagram, suggestions of hand-outs
- more stress on the value and reason for each project
- physical energizers
- role games as a method very much appreciated
- open information about each participant's project before the School
- more in-depth practical feedback on the projects
- more diversity in the working methods
- interactive approach (examples, videos etc.) – doubt, what do the respondents mean by 'interactive'
- broader perspective including economic influence on culture
- more info about sociocultural specific of the respective countries and cross-cultural work, ideas for cross-border cooperation
- suggestion for activating the artistic talents of the participants by some acting or singing classes

What did you gain by participating in the Summer School of Dialogue?

Apart from the gains mentioned regarding the workshops, the participants mentioned:

- networking, getting new peer contacts and possibilities of future cross-border cooperation
- peer feedback
- relevant examples of work in the field of culture
- inspiration by Borderland work and information about the situation in Poland
- knowledge about the situation and challenges of international contexts present in the program
- deeper realization of the importance of cross-border cooperation
- knowledge about the historical implications of the 'borderland'
- skills in presentation
- increase in energy and motivation for developing own projects
- self-confidence and stronger trust that own cultural work has meaning and sense
- new ideas for work
- new directions for further self-study
- better understanding of the community-building practices and their significance

- time for deeper reflection on the project and myself as an animator – asking new questions
- better acquaintance with ideas, interests and challenges of other animators in different areas and countries – exchange of experiences

What do you value the most about the program?

Among the most valued elements of the program the respondents mentioned:

- the quality of the workshops and professionalism of the trainers
- methods of work during the workshops
- balanced program structure and content of the Borderland School
- atmosphere and attitude of the hosts & organizers towards the participants
- the importance of the training they got for their own work
- familiarization with the practices of Borderland Foundation and NGO sector in Poland
- skills
- networking possibilities
- peer and expert feedback, supporting attitude towards the participants work
- quality of teaching that endorsed creativity

How did your attitudes, thinking about cultural activity and approach to your own work change after the Summer School?

The most underlined areas of change were:

- Greater self-awareness as an animator and social leader, auto-reflection
- Increase in skills and knowledge level, improving professional attitude towards own work
- The importance of community centered projects in local context and participatory approach
- Direction of attention to local opinion leaders and cultural stakeholders
- Readiness to undertake international initiatives
- Realization of how cultural projects and work with the tools of arts can influence society and situation in the country
- Increase in motivation openness and self-confidence level
- Tools and important for raising public awareness and community building

There were single voices indicating that the attitudes of their owners did not change greatly.

How do you intend to use and multiply in your own context the experience you gained during the Summer School of Dialogue?

The majority of the respondents declared their readiness to use the experience they gained during the Summer School, but only some of them described the ways they intend to implement it in their day to day practice:

- share the experience with the project team and members of participant's organizations, project of creating a platform for experience sharing
- realization stage of the project
- own development
- participation in other initiatives
- multiplying the knowledge in educational events of the organisation (trainings for social leaders and in university teaching)
- media activity

What can we do to make our project better and to develop it in the future?

Apart from the already mentioned suggestions for improvement, the recommendations for future editions of the Summer School pointed at the recruitment process as an area for improvement.

In some of the questionnaires there was a suggestion that the recruitment process should be modified as not to accept people without English skills or participants with no real background – better preparation, content relevant to all the participants. There was also a strong suggestion that at least one of the coordinators should be present during the interviews via skype, to make it transparent and compliant with the criteria.

Some respondents suggested also expansion of the project to others Eastern Partnership countries.

Suggestions for the local workshops:

- not to organize it too remote areas
- individual and in-depth approach to each project
- expanding the areas addressed during the Summer School
- workshops concentrated on making the ideas realistic and operational, addressing concrete problems
- improving presentation skills and pitching
- presentation of Borderland work with local community and presenting tools for such work
- presentation of other initiatives from different countries and contexts
- involvement of interested local cultural operators
- striving for and concentrating on joint cooperative projects