Exploring Visual Cultures
(Images - Worlds of Images - World Views)
A transnational internet portal on pictorial/visual memory developed by universities and curriculum developers around the globe

PROJECT IDEA
The project focuses on the conscious selection of images (i.e. artworks, architecture, design, photos, films, urban spaces, handicraft, fashion etcetera) in different countries or regions in the world, their respective interpretations, and their use in education. It is transnational, interdisciplinary, collaborative and multi-perspectival, and it aims at mutual exchange about imageries and their meanings. The central ideas are:

- How learners conceive the world is based on specific repertoires of imagined ideas or imageries. These are anchored in the collective pictorial memory, they are part of a cultural archive.

- In a globalized world we can find both, a shared, common visual sphere and accordingly world-views (as they are expressed in images and imageries) on the one hand and different, distinct, non-shared understandings and usage of images on the other.

- The educational systems have a special responsibility in this context, as they offer a space for awareness and reflection on these world-views, and their transformation in collaborative processes.

- Intercultural and transnational exchange about these imageries is an important condition for good education.

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1 We are relating education to UNESCO’s concepts on Global Citizenship Education and Education for Sustainable Development. “Global Citizenship Education aims to empower learners of all ages to assume active roles, both locally and globally, in building more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure societies. GCED is based on the three domains of learning - cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioral. Cognitive: knowledge and thinking skills necessary to better understand the world and its complexities.”
https://en.unesco.org/themes/gced/definition

“With a world population of 7 billion people [...], we, as individuals and societies need to learn to live together sustainably.” https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development
Thus this project focuses on international cooperation in cultural memory, visual culture, art history and art/heritage education - in collaboration with other disciplines (such as history and/or science), where applicable.\(^2\) The project addresses three key areas of interest:

*First*, how does a selection of “important images” (works of art, architecture, design, photos, films, handicraft, fashion etcetera) take place in different countries? Which ideas shape this selection? How is the own understanding expressed and conceived by the selection? How are the selected objects / images used and/or interpreted from the point of view of the selectors? Which narratives do they tell, which messages do they transport, which meta-narratives convey? (In the context of education: Which images are relevant in education in the participating countries, as they shape the world views of the students? How is the selection justified?)

*Secondly*, how can we enter a dialogue about these pictorial repertoires, both linguistically and artistically? How can selection and interpretation be addressed in international cooperation? How can they be used to give deeper insights through cultural comparison? How can they be useful for future pedagogical practice? Can the multi-perspective comprehension lead to a deeper understanding, e.g. similarities and differences on a global level, because images (as a non-linguistic medium) make different world-views clearer, better understandable, more arguable or assessable?

*Thirdly*, how can we train stakeholders, educators, teachers to be able to teach visual literacy in this sense? How can images be not only interpreted but also transformed, changed, re-interpreted and/or re-designed in educational contexts?

**PROJECT DEVELOPMENT**

**Phase 1: Content development**

The partners develop - in parallel - a collection of objects / images in the first step. Selection and interpretation are carried out from the perspective of the respective country’s educational interests and cultural backgrounds. The objects / images shall be relevant for education in the two respective countries. Texts (giving the reasons for the selection, interpretation using meta-narrative approaches, information how they can be used in education (schools, museums, teacher training) are written. (To start, a joint decision on a specific topic for the selection might be helpful.)

**Phase 2: Collaboration and exchange**

The partners fill an internet database with their results.\(^3\) They compare their selections, exchange the interpretations and try to find common views that represent a multi-perspective approach. Interpretation can be artistically as well. Thus, artistic and creative design approaches should be tested in this context. In this way, a multilayered, stimulating pool of materials is created for teacher training and further education, which can also be used for school lessons.

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\(^2\) In Germany, *Visual Art* is at the center. “The focus of the school-subject ‘visual art’ is the ‘image’. ‘Image’ is understood as an encompassing term, including two and three dimensional objects, art works, visually designed information, processes and situations of visual experience.” (Standing Conference of Ministries for Education in Germany, EPA, 2003). In this project the chosen interdisciplinary approach includes history (cultural history). Sciences, languages, ethics, and philosophy will be addressed as well.

\(^3\) This has to be in line with the principles of UNESCO’s guidelines of Open Educational Resources (OER).
The website works as an interactive platform for exchange or mutual learning. Finally the joint efforts can lead to a kind of a global ‘virtual museum’. Because it is editable, the database also allows canon-critical approaches.

**Phase 3: Use of the portal**

On the basis of the website, further international cooperation is intended, by involving other countries or by the already existing partners at different levels: universities (but also schools) can use the materials for their own purpose.

**BENEFITS**

**Teacher training in a global context**

The project intends that all students, teachers and researchers involved acquire intercultural and transcultural competences in a global context. Sustainable development and global citizenship need a cultural foundation. Training in the field of ‘cultural education’ can make a convincing contribution to this.

**International cooperation**

The establishment of a web-based platform can be further developed, based on e.g. joint seminars of higher education institutions. School exchange is possible in the longer term as well.

**Virtual museum**

The database has the potential to become a global and interdisciplinary ‘virtual museum’.

**CURRENT STATUS**

A pilot project has been carried out by the *University of South Africa, Pretoria* and the *Academy of Fine Arts, Munich* between September 2018 and February 2019. This has led to a prototype of a website [https://explore-vc.org](https://explore-vc.org) (PW to be requested). University of South Africa and Academy of Fine Arts are planning a joint international workshop for experts in September 2019, including partners from Ghana, Cameroon, Kenya and Uganda (South-South-Cooperation).

The project between the *University of Education, Winneba* in Ghana and the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich in Germany started in February 2019. It is funded by *Engagement Global* for three years.

The project between the *University of Yaoundé I*, the *Libre Academie des Beaux-arts* (LABA) in Douala, Cameroon and the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich started in June 2019.

**PARTNERS**

***Ghana: University of Education, Winneba (UEW),*** School of Creative Arts (Dr. Patrique deGraft-Yankson), Department of History Education (Dr. Gertrude Nkrumah)

***South Africa: University of South Africa, Pretoria (UNISA),*** Chair for African Renaissance (Dr. Esther Kibuka-Sebitosi), *University of Pretoria*, Department of Visual Arts (Dr. Amanda du Preez)
**Cameroon:** University of Yaoundé I - Department of Arts and Archeology, Yaoundé, Art History and Fine Arts Section (Dr. Paul-Henri Souvenir ASSAKO ASSAKO)

**Germany:** Academy of Fine Art Munich Department of Art Education, in Ludwig-Maximilian-University Munich, Department for Art History (Prof. Dr. Kerstin Pinther) and Museum Fünf Kontinente Munich (Dr. Stefan Eisenhofer) - supported by Bavarian Ministry of Education and Culture, Bayerische Staatskanzlei and ISB, State Institute for School Quality and Educational Research, Munich, as well as Engagement Global, Bonn / BMZ.

**Possible further partners** (in the process of negotiation):
- Sultan Qaboos University, Oman
- University of Education, Hong Kong
- Technical University in Nairobi, Kenya

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**Supported by**

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