

Informal Review of the art and design higher educational system in Lithuania.

Study programmes assessed:

1. Kaunas College *Image Design*
2. Vilnius College of design *Graphic design*
3. Vilnius academy of arts *Visual design*
4. Šiauliai university *Environmental objects design*

To start I would like to state that since my first contact with art and design education in Lithuania, there has been a big change in the better development and enhancement on structure and academic outcome. It was good to observe the shift from a strong national character to the European character with the adoption of the ECTS system and the harmonization of programmes according to the Bologna agreement.

Each programme in art and design throughout the various institutions that I have visited so far has stated clear aims and objectives as well as well defined learning outcomes. The structure of programmes in art and design follow the same structure utilized in other European institutions which is the introductory first year and the progression from teacher centered to student centered teaching and learning. It is also very positive that Art and Design programmes – both at undergraduate as well as postgraduate level - require a ‘thesis’ completion where students get to investigate and explore a self-negotiated project, using research methodologies and professional process.

Most of the institutions that I have visited have demonstrated a strong link with the relevant industry and have developed good ties with stakeholders and employers, allowing a healthy dialogue between students, staff and the workplace. There seemed to be a respect towards art and design education and this is to be commended.

Most teaching staff on these art and design programmes are well respected artists and designers and are very motivated and committed to their teaching. Unfortunately from the little experience and contact with these professionals that I had, it was noted that the remuneration is quite low – much lower than other European institutions – resulting in loss of full devotion of artists and designers to academia. The sense of community between staff and students in art and design education is very important and requires long hours of commitment. In the case of Lithuanian art and design teachers is somehow unorthodox since the low remuneration forces academics to seek extra employment through personal practice.

Another point, which I found to work against the better development of the art and design education in Lithuania, is the strong ‘local’ flavor of each establishment and the low number of students on each programme. I believe there is room for improvement here, either by merging programmes in a greater geographical area thus allowing a bigger number of candidates and also opening up to a bigger society. Art and design programmes in Kalipeda and Šiauliai had a very narrow minded approach to art and design than those programmes offered in Vilnius and Kaunas. Art and design education needs the exposure of inter-cultural input and exposure; therefore institutions must open up to new regions in Lithuania as well as other regions in the EU.

Overall I am a person who believes in art and design education not only for the development and professional turnover of artists and designers but also because such education contributes to culture and civilization. So every effort from the national agencies for education need to support - both mentally as well as physically - the further development art and design higher education in Lithuania.

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