

# Academization and its Impact on Research in Art Colleges – an Optique Belge

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by Jan Cools

The implementation of the Bologna Declaration in the European higher education system has not occurred in a unified manner.<sup>1</sup> There is no single general framework, so that the different European countries have a large degree of freedom with regard to implementation. Consequently, higher arts education is currently undergoing academization in some countries and regions, for example Finland, Sweden, and Flanders. This means that art colleges are obliged to become *academic*. Specifically, they need to develop curricula clearly embedded in artistic research. In effect, courses and programmes must be research-based and research-oriented. Master's students should even be able to participate in their professors' research projects or to undertake their own artistic research projects. This article focuses on the consequences of academization for art schools and their teaching staff, and will leave aside curricular aspects.

## Developing a research culture

Until a few years ago, art colleges in Europe had no research culture or practice to speak of. Their core business was art education. Teaching staff and organisations were focused entirely on this aspect. Against this background, the so-called academization of higher art education presents a formidable challenge. Curricular adaptations aside, this process entails fundamental changes for art colleges, especially the systematic introduction and development of a research context and culture.

Today, an art college must stimulate research activities within the context of artistic practice. It must offer artists/professors the possibility to develop an artistic poëtica or to question art practice. Moreover, an art college is also an educational institution where several forms of theoretical reflection on the arts

can be developed. Finally, an art college can also create a framework in which both autonomous routes can meet, influence each other, and even follow parallel lines in interdisciplinary research projects.

What does this mean for an art college? Today, an art college must develop a research environment and establish a research culture. The starting point should be that within each meaningful artistic practice a part should be reserved for research. Bearing this in mind, an art college has different possible strategies to establish a research environment and culture with a view to fulfilling the new *academic* tasks comprising its remit: education, research, and rendering services.

Visual arts research, however, is generally perceived as something altogether different and new. Until now, research was not readily apparent in the practice of most artists/professors. This raises a lot of questions and even prompts some resistance.

The aim of developing a strategy to implement academization should be to contribute to developing the practice of art-college-based artists and theorists by explicitly supporting research. As a result, a research culture emerges and art-college-based researchers are also stimulated to transfer the acquired knowledge and skills into their teaching. For this reason, it is necessary to set up an adapted organisation in order to build the relevant skills and to enable research. Moreover, a research infrastructure must be developed, research funds must be made available, potential researchers must be encouraged to embark on projects, and existing researchers must receive appropriate support. Researchers must be stimulated to make their research visible both within and beyond art colleges by participating in viewings and exhibitions, publishing articles, giving lectures, and so on. This encourages other colleagues to reflect on the research components within their own practice.

## Slow strategy wins

Sint-Lukas Brussels<sup>2</sup> has deliberately chosen the individual approach of the artist/researcher. Artistic research projects originate as a result of many formal and informal conversations between the college's research coordinators and its professors, always taking their artistic practice as a starting point. Research coordinators know the members of their research group, and are

thus ideally placed to direct, provoke, and even incite members of the research group to cooperate.

At the current stage, Sint-Lukas Brussels wants to provide its researchers with the freedom to experiment with different research formats, methods, output forms, and so on, thereby hoping to learn as much as possible in this process.

Promoting research at Sint-Lukas Brussels serves two aims: first, to contribute to developing the art practice of its artists/researchers; and secondly, to embed art education in research.

In the context of academization, this is a slow strategy: it takes a lot of time and there are no quick wins. However, it is also a sustainable strategy because those tasked with implementing academization come to realize that it offers many opportunities for developing artistic practice.

In conclusion, while a lot has already been achieved in making change happen, art colleges faced with academization are still in a learning process. They are regularly confronted with divergent problems and questions. For this reason, we need international networks and an ongoing exchange of experience.

1 Accessed on 19/6/1999. For the text, see <http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf>

2 University College of Art and Design Sint-Lukas Brussels, see Hogeschool Sint-Lukas Brussel, [www.sintlukas.be](http://www.sintlukas.be)

## Zusammenfassung

### Jan Cools: Die Folgen der Akademisierung am Beispiel der Forschung an belgischen Kunsthochschulen

*Noch vor wenigen Jahren war das Kerngeschäft der europäischen Kunsthochschulen die Ausbildung. Als Folge der Bologna-Deklaration müssen die Kunsthochschulen akademisch werden. Die Herausforderung besteht vor allem in der Einführung und Entwicklung eines Forschungsumfeldes und einer Forschungskultur.*

*In seinem Beitrag erläutert Jan Cools die Auswirkungen der sogenannten Akademisierung auf die belgischen Kunsthochschulen und im Besonderen auf die flämische Sint-Lukas University in Brüssel, wo er Forschungs Koordinator für die bildende und audiovisuelle Kunst ist. Um den neuen akademischen Auftrag nachhaltig zu erfüllen und dennoch individuell anzugehen, hat die Sint-Lukas University Forschungs Koordinatoren eingestellt, die im Austausch mit den Professoren/Künstlern Projekte anstossen und die interdisziplinäre Zusammenarbeit fördern sollen. Auf diese Weise können die Professoren/Künstler ihre inneren Widerstände gegenüber der Forschung überwinden und aus ihrer eigenen künstlerischen Praxis heraus Forschungsaktivitäten entwickeln, die in die Lehre zurückfließen. Experimentieren mit Forschungsformen und -methoden ist erwünscht. Die Strategie ist als langfristiger Lernprozess angelegt, in welchem internationale Netzwerke und der Erfahrungsaustausch eine wichtige Rolle einnehmen.*