

Artistic contribution / Conference on the 10th anniversary of the Charter

Galley Proof - The Charter on the Road

Good afternoon everyone!

My name is Sylvia Winkler and this is my colleague Stephan Köperl. We are visual artists and it is us who have set up this installation in front of the hall. The title of this project is: 'galley-proof: the Charter on the road'.

It started last year, when we were asked to contribute to a theater-festival called "The Future of Europe". And when thinking about how Europe will look tomorrow we realized that its future is shaped by today's legislation. That's why we decided to focus our artwork on the Charter.

With its full text printed on big sheets, we expose the visitors to their fundamental European rights. And we ask them: „Is there anything that should be added or edited?“ Subsequently we discuss the individual articles of the Charter with the citizens. Changes with respect to a more humane and sustainable Europe are then added to the text. With red and green marker, like proof-readers edit a galley-proof before publishing. This is where the name of our project comes from.

Since this festival we are performing this participatory intervention in different cities and locations.

We feel that our appearance in public spaces represents an extraordinary challenge for the ordinary passerby. Usually citizens are not exposed to such a big body of legislative text and are rarely asked for their opinion about it.

But the fact that we are not commissioned by the European Union nor by any political party or NGO turns out to be an advantage in stimulating the people's interest and in involving them in discussion.

The reactions are, of course, very diverse and range from aversion, over indifference to passionate engagement. One person remarked that he would never dare to touch this document since it is too important to just play with it in an artistic project.

Another person assumed that this was an official participatory process - as he once was involved in drafting a new constitution for Saxony-Anhalt after the Wall came down.

Of course there are also grumpy passers-by ranting about the EU as a whole.

And then there are those dedicated participants who spend a long time reading and discussing. Some show up several times and not few of them have profound knowledge about specific topics of the Charter: Like on educational sciences, trade unionism, animal protection or public management.

The issues raising most interest and discussion include the right to a self-determined death, the distribution of wealth or the relationship between religion and the state.

To our surprise, the participants' suggestions for alternative or additional wording remain quite close to the legal text. Instead of formulating utopias for a better living, as would be possible within the framework of an art project.

To summarize our experience, we would say that the possibility of active participation encourages people to take a closer look at the Charter; to read and to reflect on its individual articles. And at the same time, the participatory process raises awareness about the complexity of creating a legal document that all member states agree on.

We never expected that our symbolic art project would ever reach those who are in charge of the European citizens' fundamental rights.

So here we are with our installation. Please talk to us during the breaks and share with us your personal vision for an even better Charter. It was never that easy as it is today!

Thank you very much.





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