

ARTS-BASED EDUCATION TO DEVELOP CREATIVITY IN LITHUANIA: INSIGHTS FROM PUBLIC POLICY THEORIES

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Abstract. This study is a critical overview of the Lithuanian system of arts-based education, which provides conditions for the development of creativity in children and young people. The aim of the study is to provide an analysis of the ongoing transformations, changes, and tensions that are emerging in the field of an arts-based education in Lithuania. The authors analyze the particular case of arts-based education with reference to several theoretical public policy frameworks. Insights gained from the historical institutionalist approach illuminate the path dependency that favors institutionalized, centralized, elitist forms of traditional arts-based education, such as music and fine art schools. This system maintains centralized funding that allocates money from national and local authorities to long-established institutions of arts-based education. The punctuated equilibrium framework developed by Baumgartner and Jones (1993) in their book *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* has highlighted the reform of the national curriculum, the neoliberal education policies, the diversification of providers and services, the increased emphasis on client choice and their financial participation, administrative and fiscal decentralization with the introduction of student baskets in general, non-formal and higher education as turning points, and critical junctures that fundamentally changed the entire structure of the education system in Lithuania. Based on the multiple streams framework developed by John W. Kingdon in his book *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (originally published in 1984), the analysis revealed that the Lithuanian arts-based education system has unfortunately not gained new momentum but rather operates under the influence of general education and cultural policy decisions. The advocacy coalition framework developed by Paul A. Sabatier and Hank C. Jenkins-Smith in their book *Policy Change and Learning: An Advocacy Coalition Approach* revealed how heterogeneous groups of actors (i.e., students and parents, art teachers and educational administrators, and entrepreneurs in the educational market of arts-based education) participated in the process of implementing neoliberal policies, changes in educational funding, and the commodification of education.

Keywords: advocacy coalition framework, arts education, arts-based education, creativity development, formal education, historical institutionalism, multiple streams framework, neoliberalism, non-formal education, public policy reform, punctuated equilibrium framework.

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1. Introduction

The benefits and value of including arts into general education are widely discussed in academic literature. Extensive studies show that student participation in the arts has positive academic achievements, including low socioeconomic status students, improving mathematical skills and reading proficiency, self-concept and motivation, and higher levels of empathy and tolerance for others (Catterall et al., 1999; Lloyd, 2017). Arts education contributes to social

inclusion by enhancing learning for low socioeconomic status students. There are benefits to incorporating the arts into special education using the arts with students with disabilities (Malley & Silverstein, 2014).

An arts-based education has long played an important role in the development of creativity as the ability to produce novel and original ideas and things. Skills and abilities associated with creativity, such as flexibility, fluency, originality, and elaboration (Torrance, 1966), as well as imagination, productivity (the ability to generate a variety of ideas through divergent thinking), originality (the ability to develop ideas and products that are new and unusual), problem-solving (the application of knowledge and imagination to a given situation), and the ability to produce an outcome of value and worth, are considered highly important in today's world of dynamic change, diversity, and uncertainty.

Countries with a creativity index above the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development average, such as Singapore (Cunningham & Gibson, 2023) or Australia (Saunders, 2021), strive to maintain the traditional link between creativity and an arts-based education. New evidence-based and experimental studies on creativity in children's education show that a comprehensive arts-based education can be an effective way to develop children's creativity (Huang et al., 2025; Hui et al., 2015). All of these findings underscore the importance and necessity of integrating an arts education into school and university curricula for its potential impact on creativity.

That is why creativity as a vehicle for innovation and economic growth has been introduced into policy-making. Naturally, an increased focus on creativity has emerged in the curricula of many countries. A relatively recent development is the international benchmarking of creativity in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) student achievement survey (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2024). Furthermore, representatives of cultural and creative industries, including *Lego* and others, have played an important role in promoting the need to measure and monitor the development of creative competence (Harris & Carter, 2021).

It is therefore important to have effective policies on arts education and creativity. In academic research, some authors (Graham et al., 2022) discuss various ways of approaching arts education policies. Among many topics and research domains, the authors distinguish these areas: the analysis of policy formation (how policies were created) and implementation; the examination of arts advocacy policies that increase the value of arts learning; the study of how political ideas (e.g., neoliberal ideas about competition, performance, privatization, and precarity) shape arts education policies; the analysis of policy stakeholders and actors; the impact of education reforms on arts education, etc. Shaw (2019) emphasizes the need to identify the constituents, coalitions of key actors, and significant events in arts policy formation, in order to identify the evolution of past policies, and the ways in which issues and problems are framed and resolved. Shaw (2022) emphasizes the diffusion and convergence of policy ideas, the complex nature of the policy formation process. The author explains how several theoretical frameworks such as the multiple streams framework (MSF) (Kingdon, 2011), the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993), and the punctuated equilibrium framework (PEF) (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993), reveal the complexity of actors and actions and unpack the nonlinear, unpredictable, and the bricolage nature of arts education policy (Ball, 1998; Shaw, 2019).

The aim of this study is to provide an analysis of the ongoing transformations, changes, and key actors of arts-based education in Lithuania, referring to several theoretical public policy frameworks, this research also considers the potential development of the field.

2. Arts-based education policy through the lens of theoretical frameworks

For arts-based education policy analysis, several conceptual frameworks can provide valuable insights. Shaw (2019) describes how the PEF (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993), the MSF (Kingdon, 2011), and the ACF (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993) reveal the complexity and fluidity of the policy formulation process, emphasizing that the policy making process could be described as bricolage when different stages of policy formation, implementation, and outcomes overlap, and different actors and factors intersect in complex and unpredictable way. The most prominent authors of the PEF, Baumgartner and Jones (1993), propose an understanding of the dynamics of public policy change. According to the authors, policy evolves gradually, sometimes unpredictably, and is characterized by periods of stasis (incremental, smooth development), and bursts of activity (sporadic, significant, and radical changes). By applying the PEF, Lundgren et al. (2018) analyze the degree of policy punctuation by assessing patterns and variations in the relationship between phases of stability and moments of change. There may be periods of “tall peaks” with sharp, abrupt, and significant dramatic changes. “Long tails” represent long and extended periods of relative stability with minimal change. “High frictions” that occur during the period of “long tails” manifest a high resistance to change. Meanwhile, “low frictions” are associated with low resistance, which is possible during the process of minimal adjustments and incremental change made over an extended period of time. At the same time, the PEF illuminates how large government systems, which are conservative and relatively fixed, seek to maintain stability, resist change, and preserve the *status quo*, returning to stability after bursts of radical change. Flink (2017) shows how the theory of punctuated equilibrium can be helpful in trying to understand changes in public funding. The author illustrates how the theory seeks to embrace both incrementalism (continuous and slow changes) and the expectation of major change, combining slow processes with dramatic events (punctuations). Furthermore, policy feedback is conceptualized in the theory of how punctuated equilibrium, as the success or failure of a particular policy, is determined by organizational performance. As Flink (2017) noted, the feedback received by policy-makers provides information for making minor or major adjustments.

Along with the PEF, it is helpful to consider arts-based education-related reforms from the perspective of historical institutionalism (Pierson, 2000a, 2000b; Kickert & van der Meer, 2011). Viewing education as a domain of historically grown and entrenched institutions characterized by stability and inertia, we can understand why transformations occur in an incremental and gradual manner, how path dependency affects reforms, and how punctuated equilibrium emerges within the long static periods between brief critical juncture reforms (Kickert & van der Meer, 2011). Transformation occurs through the long-term accumulation

of many small changes. Historical institutionalism emphasizes that history matters and institutional changes depend not only on current actions but also on the historical path that led to these institutions. Historical traditions in states, politics, governments, and administrations have preserved current developments. “In the historical institutionalism perspective, long periods of stable equilibriums of institutional patterns dominate, and only incremental changes take place” (Kickert & van der Meer, 2011, p. 477).

Another insightful approach in analyzing arts-based education is the MSF (Kingdon, 2011), which helps to clarify how the importance of arts-based education is articulated in the policy-making process. Kingdon (2011) highlights the importance of three streams that operate independently, joining, and coupling, and altogether creating a window of opportunity: the problem stream, the policy stream, and the political stream. As Howlett et al. (2017) note, Kingdon’s (2011) theory recognizes several semi-independent streams of events and actors interacting in the policy-making process. These streams create complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty. Howlett et al. (2017) note that policy development and changes emerge in a complex interaction and intersection of the three streams and do not occur automatically or spontaneously in response to a social problem. As Shaw (2019) comments, according to Kingdon (2011), policy entrepreneurs play a key role in the coupling of streams and in capturing policy windows, which are often only open for a brief time. They wait for problems to arise and for a development in the political stream to provide a window of opportunity through which the issues and solutions raised by the policy entrepreneurs can be brought onto government agendas.

According to Shaw (2019), the ACF (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993) can provide a valuable perspective on the development of arts-based education. As Howlett et al. (2017) note, this theory critiques the policy cycle framework, which depicts policy-making as a linear and logical progression of policy activities and a sequence of problem-solving activities. The ACF emphasizes that in practice real processes are messier and more contradictory, full of tensions, and less sequential by recognizing the role of heterogeneous forces and actors. Howlett et al. (2017) observed the ACF explains the policy-making process as a “black box” in which the inputs produced by a successful coalition somehow lead to policy outcomes.

The following this scientific debate we formulated the research questions, which help to critically analyze and highlight trends and development in arts-based education in Lithuania:

1. How do the principles of path dependency and historical predisposition within the theory of historical institutionalism explain current developments in the arts-based education system?
2. How do the concepts of critical junctures and incremental change within the PEF illuminate the reforms of the educational system? What implications have they had for arts-based education?
3. What insights does the MSF provide into the status of arts-based education in the context of Lithuanian educational reforms?
4. How does the ACF elucidate the role of stakeholders and the dynamics of their negotiations in formulating arts-based education policy?

3. Methodology

This article presents a qualitative retrospective and theory-driven policy analysis of the Lithuanian case of arts-based education. The research is conducted according to an approach mentioned by some authors (Graham et al., 2022), where arts education policy is based on both policy texts and policy making actions and is studied through an empirical, theoretical, or philosophical inquiry. The authors explore the historical development of public policies and reforms since the 1990s through the lens of the theoretical frameworks as analytical tools to interpret empirical data. This paper attempts to provide a complex analysis of the processes, actors, and policy decisions that have created the conditions for the current state of arts education. The authors of this article used the influential theoretical frameworks in policy analysis (Baumgartner and Jones' (1993) PEF, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's (1993) ACF, and Kingdon's (2011) MSF by referring to scholarly articles by prominent authors and the work of other researchers on the topic.

For the empirical analysis, the authors used policy texts and documents, including official regulations, strategies, and reports, reflecting the main policy making actions and policy implementation effects since Lithuania Independence Restoration in 1990.

For a better understanding and interpretation of policy making decisions and complex and rich social, political, and cultural context in Lithuania, the authors used scientific articles written by Lithuanian scholars.

Thus, the study includes three sources of analysis – empirical data (policy documents) and academic works that present and discuss concepts and features of prominent theoretical frameworks in policy analysis and scientific articles that deliberate education policy in Lithuania.

The key policies and policy texts for empirical analysis of public policy in arts-based education in Lithuania were selected for their relevance to the concepts of the selected theoretical frameworks, time, and influence on arts-based education in Lithuania. Thus, relying on the nature of qualitative analysis, the authors selected the most relevant documents from 1990 to the present day and synthesized insights from the works of other academic authors.

Thus, the process of selecting research sources was purposeful (theory-driven), seeking to include documents that reflect key policy actions and changes. Although conceptual and theoretical frameworks share some common functions with literature reviews, according to Rocco and Plakhotnik (2009), conceptual and theoretical frameworks have their specific features. A theoretical framework is defined as "a logically developed and connected set of concepts and premises – developed from one or more theories" (Varpio et al., 2020, p. 990). A theoretical framework provides the structure, the scaffolding, and the frame of your study (Merriam, 1998). By exploring the specific case of the development of arts-based education policy in Lithuania through the lens of the above frameworks and gaining insights from the examples of authors who have applied these frameworks individually or in combination (Shaw, 2019; de Azevedo Almeida & Corrêa Gomes, 2018), the authors of this paper have discerned the policy components, key actors, and coalitions, identified how issues are framed and problematized, and how specific solutions are designed, as well as how to interpret the evolving policy. It allowed to use theoretical frameworks as analytical

tools to shed light on arts education policy in Lithuania, and at the same time the case study allowed to substantiate and demonstrate the theoretical frameworks used.

By combining the analysis of documents with the interpretation of theoretical frameworks (historical institutionalism, the PEF, the MSF, and the ACF), the article elucidates the development of arts-based education policy in Lithuania, revealing how educational reforms imposed on the development of the arts-based education system, including its funding and forms of organization, and how different players in the system contribute to its current and future development and the status of arts-based education in the overall educational system of Lithuania.

4. Findings

4.1. Tradition and path dependency in arts-based education

Looking at arts-based education from the perspective of assessing the interplay between rapid changes brought about by radical reforms and slow incremental changes associated with inertia and resistance to change, it is important to draw on insights from historical institutionalism (Pierson, 2000a, 2000b; Kickert & van der Meer, 2011). This approach emphasizes that the outcomes of the policy-making process can be influenced by historically evolved patterns and path dependencies, which is why transformation can be slowed down by the tendency of large institutions toward stability. Punctuated equilibrium emerges as a long period of stasis between reforms. In terms of the historical predisposition of arts-based education, music in Lithuania is seen as an essential part of national identity. Lithuanians see themselves as a "singing" nation. Music and songs were particularly important during the resistance against the Soviet regime in the late 1980s' political organisation Sajūdis (this period was called the Singing Revolution) and in the 1990s, after regaining independence and promoting a national identity building project. The Lithuanian Song and Dance Festival celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2024, which demonstrates this strong musical culture in the country. However, it must be admitted that during the Soviet period, authorities regarded this musical culture and all artistic creations as an instrument of ideological education, implementing the agenda of the cultural rapprochement of nations. In Lithuania, national cultural traditions were preserved not by the official state cultural policy of the time but by the initiative of individual creators and the nation. Gabnytė-Bizevičienė (2014) reviews the historical musical tradition of Lithuania starting in the 14th century, noting that music schools as a specific institution date to the 1950s. Assessing the impact of the last few decades, it can be acknowledged that the musical culture in the Lithuanian tradition was strengthened by the institutionalization of the Soviet period. Widely established music schools provided musical education that led to a high level of musical competence and paved the way for the professionalization of prospective musicians. Today's music schools are mainly non-formal educational institutions for pupils, representing the type of educational school that complements a formal education. There have been no significant changes and only some adjustments to the aims, objectives, content, and expected results of their education. Since the Soviet era, non-formal education schools for the arts in Lithuania have constituted specialized education for talented children. The networks of these schools are unevenly distributed across regions, which creates limited

access for children from low socioeconomic status families and rural areas. These historical traditions and institutional patterns create a path dependency in which music is prioritized over other art forms (theatre/drama, new media arts) in formal school and non-formal education. Historical predispositions have maintained the strong institutionalization of music and other traditional forms of education in the form of specialized schools, with strong regulations within a centralized funding system.

Inherited from historical path dependency, centralization is another feature of the public administration and management system. Administrative reforms in independent Lithuania aimed to enable decision making at the municipal level. However, the prevailing historical patterns of centralized public administration have created barriers. Examples include funding structures and systems developed over decades through the allocation of funds from the state budget by ministries. Difficulties with introducing market and entrepreneurial elements to provide educational services and inviting different providers while introducing a non-formal education basket/voucher have their historic roots in a weak entrepreneurial culture and historical structural and institutional framework in Lithuania in the pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods.

4.2. Policy shifts and critical junctures: the punctuated equilibrium framework

Following the PEF and seeking to identify the interplay between periods of stability and phases of abrupt and dramatic change, the reform of the education system in Lithuania could be analyzed by recognizing turning points and revealing radical and incremental changes. The development of the Lithuanian education system has been greatly influenced by changes in education, the socioeconomic context throughout Central and Eastern Europe, and the processes of globalization (Urbanovič, 2012). The first stage of the general education system and curricular reorganization in Lithuania (from 1988 to 1997) included the development of new educational frameworks and models based on a new paradigm (Bruzgelevičienė, 2008). In 1991, the promulgation of the education reform was launched; in 1992, the Lithuanian concept of education was developed (Smsm.lrv.lt, 2026). In 1994, general programmes (national curriculum) were adopted; and in 1997, the general programmes for grades 1–10 and the draft of the state education standards were approved. In 1999, laws were drafted in almost all areas of education, and in 2000, the legal educational framework was completed (Lrv.lt. Švietimo, mokslo ir sporto ministerija, 2026). Besides updating the curriculum, these changes aimed to free the system from the legacy of the Soviet system and introduce humanism and progressivism. The objective also was to strengthen the nation's education (this period is also known as the concept of the national school and decentralize the Soviet era system of education management). As part of this reform, the curriculum of arts-based education subjects was revised, among others. Arts-based education subjects played a special role in education to strengthen the national identity, so that music, dance, and crafts are considered an important part of the national identity.

The next steps in updating the national curriculum in 2008 and in 2019–2023 cannot be compared in terms of their scale and radical transformation with the first stage of educational reform in the 1990s. Indeed, they can be considered mild changes compared to the first decade of curricular transformation in Lithuania that overcame the Soviet legacy.

The update of the general curriculum framework for 2019–2023 focused on strengthening competence-based education. Several competences were identified, such as cognitive, creative, civic, cultural, and communicative, as well as socioemotional and healthy life competences. It was emphasized that their development must be integrated into subjects. For arts-based education, this process has meant that the integration of creative and cultural competences into different subjects will give arts-based education a new opportunity to be better represented in the curriculum and to be linked to other competences. For example, strengthening the link between arts and information and communications technology competences would create the conditions to develop modern audiovisual arts. The new curricular descriptions for art education emphasize learning outside school – for example, by visiting art galleries and museums.

4.3. New financing schemes as critical junctures and their implications to arts education

In Lithuania, major changes in public funding were the steps taken for education reform. This introduced new per-pupil funding principles, a basket/voucher system in three sectors: formal general schools, non-formal education for pupils, and higher education. These changes in funding, with other measures of neoliberal policy, could be perceived as the main events that changed the game. According to the general logic of this type of financing, the money for education was allocated on a per-pupil basis, and the money followed the pupil/student.

Like other countries in transition, because of neoliberal reforms, Lithuania has introduced the student basket as a new model for financing education. This principle of school funding, known in other countries as *per capita* funding or school vouchers, was a distinctive feature of countries in Central and Eastern Europe, indicating a shift from input-based to *per capita* funding in education (Alonso & Sánchez, 2011). The Lithuanian reform, according to which government spending is calculated per pupil in schools, became a specific version of education voucher reforms. In this system, “funds follow the child”. Governments subsidize education either directly – by giving a coupon to each parent – or indirectly – by funding schools of choice in strict proportion to enrollment. We can mention a radical nationwide voucher reform in Sweden in the early 1990s, which produced a rapid expansion of private (voucher) schools in the 2000s (Böhlmark & Lindahl, 2015; Edmark et al., 2024).

In Lithuania, the introduction of the basket/voucher system took place during the second stage of the education reform (from 1998 to 2002). The methodology of the funding scheme was adopted by the Government of Lithuania in 2001, and its implementation began in 2002 (Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, 2010). In 2009, a basket/ voucher for university students was introduced. In 2011, a non-formal education basket/voucher was launched. These historical moments in the introduction of the student voucher (basket) funding system in comprehensive schools, in the non-formal education sector, and in universities can be seen as radical changes, critical junctures, which shook up the *status quo* and turned into “tall peaks”, with high frictions expressing high resistance to change. Extended periods of time after these historic moments of substantial change become phases of stabilization and can be called “long tails” with adjustments, incremental changes, and lower resistance.

The introduction of the new basket/voucher systems became pillars and milestones of neoliberal policies in Lithuania, changing the general educational landscape. These changes helped to maintain the three main neoliberal technologies of the market, management, and performance distinguished by Ball (2016) and See Teng et al. (2020). These technologies promoted a market orientation in the system to attract customers, privatize service delivery, encourage customer (student, parent) choice, diversify services and providers, increase accountability and quality, make services efficient by arranging competitions between providers in the market, and support customers' choice to receive services according to their interests and preferences. With the introduction of basket funding, the participants (pupils, students, and their parents) can choose the school, non-formal education center, or university. The money that a school, university, or other educational institution receives directly depends on the number of pupils/students.

In the Lithuanian education system, the basket/voucher system promoted, first, an endogenous mode of privatization, which, according to Ball (2016), serves to make public service organizations operate similar to a business. Formal and informal educational institutions operate based on a pupil's basket/voucher. Money "follows the pupil", and through choice and competition, the authorities seek efficiency in managing this money. Money is allocated to schools according to the number of pupils enrolled, the more pupils, the higher the funding. In Lithuania, the exogenous privatization mode can also be observed when new providers are introduced into the provision of education services. These private providers receive money from parents' financial contributions and from the state-funded pupil basket/voucher, which is given to private providers if clients (pupils and parents) choose them. The pupil's non-formal education basket, introduced in 2011 and piloted in 2011–2014, became a key measure of the neoliberal reform aimed at diversifying the education market by enabling new service providers and implying a financial contribution from parents to services. Increasing privatization while new players were introduced into the field (service providers) manifested the destatalization process (Jessop, 2002). This process comprised the state's steady withdrawal from direct service provision and the increasing use of contracting out and assigning to the state new functions of funding, contracting, monitoring, and benchmarking. The role of the state has been to establish the legal and administrative framework for funding and service provision to ensure better conditions for addressing clients' (young people's) needs for more diverse and geographically accessible services.

In 2011, with the introduction of the non-formal education basket/voucher for pupils, non-formal education programmes were clearly divided into two groups: 1) non-formal education programmes that are flexible in their content, timing, and methods and can be implemented in clubs and studios (in Lithuanian: *būreliai*), as well as 2) non-formal education programmes that complement a formal education and aim to provide additional competences by systematically improving students' knowledge, skills, and abilities in a particular area. The latter would be implemented by music, sports, and art schools. The non-formal education funding model allocates a certain amount of money per month to each pupil participating in extracurricular activities. The financial reform initiators thought that the effective development of this system would preserve state-run arts-based education schools and safeguard their quality. In addition, they also hoped that this model would increase the choice and diversity

of non-formal education services and improve the quality of the services provided. The introduction of pupils' basket/voucher for non-formal education has been accompanied by the creation of organizational and financial conditions for various services providers, both formal and informal education institutions in the public and private sectors.

Under the reform of introducing a basket/voucher to the higher education sector, universities started to receive money from the state budget based on students' choice of study programmes and their matriculation exam results. These changes in the university funding system have also affected the prioritization of school subjects. Arts-based education subjects in comprehensive schools became even less significant from the perspective of securing university financing for a student. Few school subjects were considered important (*i.e.*, the Lithuanian language, mathematics, and other science, technology, engineering subjects, history, and English).

Due to this basket/voucher reform, money follows students based on matriculation exam results. Correspondingly, the university network was optimized (mostly understood as reducing the number of universities) to address the demographic decline in the population and the decreasing number of school-leavers and, consequently, university students. These processes affected the quality and the overall situation of arts-based education in general education. During the optimization of the university network and the functioning of the basket system, the long-established arts-based education and sports teacher training programmes were either closed or encountered a dramatic decrease in the number of students at several Lithuanian universities – Šiauliai University, Klaipėda University, and the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences later merged with Vytautas Magnus University (VMU). These changes eventually are likely to have negative effects on the overall quality of arts-based education in comprehensive schools and the non-formal education sector.

In introducing the new funding system based on students' basket/voucher, the Lithuanian universities specializing in professionalizing artists – Vilnius Academy of Arts-based education, the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, the Music Academy of VMU, and others – actively participated in designing the measures of the new funding. These universities were politically successful in securing substantial funding through student baskets/vouchers to cover the costs of individualized teaching/learning and expensive music equipment. In addition, these universities gained the right to organize their own specialized entrance exams, while applicants to other study programmes were admitted solely based on school examinations.

4.4. Decentralization as a critical juncture in arts education policy

The neo-liberal education policy includes decentralization of schools with more emphasis on the municipal and local level, and addressing communities (including clients and parents). From the perspective of historical institutionalism, it should be admitted that Lithuania inherited a highly centralized education system from the Soviet era, when the management system worked based on centralization, bureaucracy, and control. Thus, decentralization was one of the key directions of public administration reform implemented in the 1990s – the first decade of independence – aimed at changing the management, governance, and financing of education. The reform promoted the principle of subsidiarity and aimed to implement the concept of new governance, in which democratic values are introduced into the management

of the public sector (Urbanovič & Patapas, 2012). Decentralization as a strategy involves the delegation of certain responsibilities and decisions from the central authorities to the local government and community levels (Smalskys et al., 2019). According to Urbanovič (2012), the decentralization of management and decision making in education in Lithuania highlighted the reduction of the influence of the central authority, state control, and government management and aimed to create a decentralized school management model with school autonomy and self-governance, giving responsibility, and accountability to the school, delegating decision-making power to local stakeholders and empowering local participation processes (school principals and administrations, teachers, parents, and the community). The reform of the public administration system in Lithuania included the process of empowering municipalities to make their own decisions on a wide range of public policy matters, including education. Most general education schools in Lithuania are owned by local authorities. Municipalities are responsible for formal and non-formal education institutions such as pre-schools, primary, and secondary schools, music schools, libraries, and cultural centers. Fiscal decentralization in education as an increase of financial autonomy and independence of local authorities was achieved by changing the financing model of general education. Local authorities receive special targeted grants from the state budget to fund general education schools. The pupil basket/voucher scheme was designed to delegate decision making to the municipal level for the management and administration of funds provided by the state to educate pupils. Notably, according to the principle of fiscal decentralization, the financial independence of local authorities increased, separating the functions of the central government and local authorities in the public sector of the economy. This was possible through the financial structure when tax sources were allocated both to the central and local levels of government, state grants were given to municipalities, and there was a municipality borrowing mechanism (Davulis & Kučaidze, 2014). On the one hand, the municipalities were given the possibility of disposing of the pupil basket funds allocated by the state budget (teaching funds). On the other hand, they were obliged to provide school maintenance funds for the formal and non-formal education process from their own resources. However, as Gediminas Davulis and Kučaidze (2014) note, based on the pupil basket/voucher principle, the model is still characterized by a high degree of centralization. The funds calculated each year for a conventional student should be spent according to the pupil basket methodology approved by the government, and there is limited autonomy in the distribution of special targeted funds. The decentralization of decision making and management was an essential part of the educational reform and became a profound structural change in Lithuania. This administrative and fiscal decentralization has become a "tall peak" with major "bursts" and radical changes accompanied by the introduction of neoliberal policies.

In the context of decentralization, at the municipal level, arts-based education is implemented as a part of the formal curriculum and non-formal education in general education schools and in non-formal education institutions, which are established by municipalities. There are several types of institutions at the municipal level that provide non-formal education: 1) non-formal education schools for children established by municipalities; 2) institutions of complementary education to formal education set up by municipalities (e.g., music, art, sports schools); 3) other institutions set up by municipalities (cultural institutions, youth

centers, etc.); 4) schools for general education; and 5) other providers (private companies, associations, and other non-state bodies) (Valstybės kontrolė, 2015). Municipal non-formal education programmes allocate funds to service providers recorded in the national register of formal and non-formal education programmes *AIKOS*.

Municipalities distribute funds from the state budget and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (ŠMSM) (Lithuania) within the framework of the pupil's basket/voucher and the non-formal education basket/voucher. In the form of a pupil's basket/voucher, the state budget provides funds for teachers' salaries, professional development, textbooks, and curriculum implementation. Simultaneously, municipalities should finance the buildings and building operating costs (heating, energy, etc.) of the institutions they establish. This is a significant part of the municipalities' expenditure on financing educational institutions. The general logic of administrative reform can be observed here when it is intended to empower local authorities to make decisions (by managing state funds through the pupil's basket/voucher) and to take responsibility for funding formal and non-formal education institutions and programmes (the material maintenance of schools). However, municipalities take responsibility for supporting large, long-established non-formal education institutions (music, sports schools, etc.). Meanwhile, new service providers that are not set up by municipalities often have their own infrastructure (either owned or rented). Some of these costs may be included in the bids that private providers submit in a competitive process for municipally supported programmes. The National Audit Report (Valstybės kontrolė, 2015) found that in most municipalities, the financial and material support for non-formal education institutions is insufficient.

Municipalities contribute unevenly to the development of non-formal education facilities for pupils, with some municipalities succeeding in creating a range and diversity of activities, while others are less successful (especially in smaller towns and rural areas). In National Audit Report (Valstybės kontrolė, 2015), the National Audit Office of Lithuania found that municipalities either use the funds received from the state through the pupil basket/voucher scheme according to their objectives or fund music and sports schools established by municipalities. However, they do not adequately fund a wider range of non-formal education activities and services and a wide range of providers. Municipalities are responsible for defining the content/curriculum of non-formal education, teaching/learning methods, and requirements. They should evaluate the quality of non-formal education with the necessary procedures for quality assurance. The National Audit Report (Valstybės kontrolė, 2015) found that such procedures are not applied in many municipalities. These challenges and pitfalls in the governance and management of formal and non-formal education show that there is still a lack of experience and competence at the local level and that the system cannot yet function effectively in a decentralized manner.

Other important actors in a decentralized system are schools, parents, communities, and service providers. At the school level, administrators and teachers participate in the direct provision of arts-based education in the formal curriculum (compulsory and optional arts-based education subjects), influence pupils' choice of optional subjects, organize the integration of subjects with a focus on arts-based education and creativity, choose methods and pedagogical settings for teaching and learning, and may promote out-of-class activities with museums, art galleries, theatres, and professionals (actors, artists) who teach arts-based

education subjects. From the very beginning of independence, the role of the teacher in the school was seen as an important principle of decentralization and local decision making.

The Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania (E-seimas.lrs.lt, 1991) and its revisions (E-seimas.lrs.lt, 2011) state that a teacher is "free to choose the ways and forms of organizing pedagogical activities". This concept opened more possibilities for innovation and creativity in schools.

At the school level, arts-based education activities and projects can directly contribute to pupils' well-being and encourage self-expression and creativity. General education schools are responsible for providing a choice of extracurricular non-formal activities in clubs and studios – a minimum of two hours per week (as allocated by the educational plans and funding according to the pupil's basket/voucher). In addition, general education schools can apply for municipality funding for non-formal education programmes from the non-formal education basket/voucher for pupils (15–25 euros per month for one club per pupil). The National Audit Report (Valstybės kontrolė, 2015) found that local authorities and schools were not using all the pupil basket funding for pupils' non-formal education for that purpose, as the basket methodology intended, and were using it for other purposes. Hence, insufficient attention has been paid to non-formal education after school, for which pupils can choose from a wide range of free-of-charge activities. The National Audit Report (Valstybės kontrolė, 2015) also noted that municipalities lack a well-developed network of non-formal education institutions for pupils and do not ensure a variety of non-formal education activities. The proportion of pupils participating in non-formal education varies from 4% to 61% across municipalities (Valstybės kontrolė, 2015). A publication reviewing the state of education at the national and municipal levels of 2023 (Bakanas et al., 2023, pp. 18–19) states that 62.6% of children participated in non-formal education programmes in 2022. These low participation rates reveal significant challenges in the implementation of non-formal education in municipalities.

According to the principle of subsidiarity within neoliberal policies, parents become one of the main financial contributors to educational services that pay for their children's non-formal education. A study in several Lithuanian municipalities (Pasirenkamojo vaikų ugdymo prieinamumo tyrimas, 2014) found that when pupils were surveyed about how their extracurricular activities were financed, 53% said that their parents paid for them. In this situation, it might be assumed that low-income parents have fewer opportunities to meet their children's educational needs.

Besides the main administrative and education reform measures aimed at decentralization, it can be observed that the institutions and bodies operating on the central level of governance have retained their profound weight in decision making, which has been inherited and maintained as a historical pattern, creating a path dependency. Centralized and highly institutionalized historically rooted practices, which create institutional inertia after radical bursts of change within decentralization reforms, were both a counterbalance and barrier to the implementation of intended actions during the period of "long tails". As Urbanovič and Patapas (2012) reveal in their empirical research, decentralization and self-governance at the local and school level have faced challenges for many reasons, including the lack of consistent educational policies, lack of management skills and expertise, ability to act independently and autonomously, lack of ability and willingness to take responsibility, problems in dele-

gating responsibilities to the community (including parents), lack of trust culture, insufficient mentoring, and financial support. Central bodies are responsible for the overall architecture of the system and are the main players in the whole ecosystem of actors. These include the ŠMSM and its agencies (the National Agency for Education (NŠA) (Lithuania) and the Lithuanian Agency for Non-Formal Education (*L/NEŠA*) (Lithuania)).

The ŠMSM and the NŠA oversee the formulation of the national curriculum. They initiate and coordinate the process of updating the national curriculum, mobilizing experts and stakeholders, organizing discussions, preparing the final document, and translating it into a legal framework through laws and decrees. They are responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the process. The renewed national curricula describe the competences to be developed in arts-based education subjects, the assessment, the description of the competences in the different grades, the methods of assessment, which arts-based education subjects are compulsory and optional in which grades, and how arts-related competences can be integrated into other subjects. The general education curriculum specifies the number of hours per year. The results of various international studies show that arts occupy a secondary position in the hierarchy of all subjects (e.g., compared to subjects such as mathematics, Lithuanian, English, history, and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects). This can be observed in the elective (non-compulsory) status of arts-based education subjects, with fewer teaching hours; in the way that arts-based education examinations are included in the school-leaving examination system; and how this is linked to the process of university entry.

The central national regulatory level includes the processes of how the integration of different school subjects is provided for in policy, how formal and informal levels of learning intersect, and how links between in-school and out-of-school learning are organized at the central level in the country. In addition to regulating the national curriculum, central government agencies are responsible for regulating and overseeing initial and continuing teacher education, which sets forth a way of training arts-based education teachers and promoting their professional development. The NŠA uses European Union funds for many teachers' training programmes, including those for arts-based education teachers.

In addition to the non-formal education basket/voucher as an instrument for allocating funds that the state budget gives municipalities, the ŠMSM and the *L/NEŠA* bestowed upon themselves the possibility of administering the national non-formal education programmes for pupils (by organizing calls and selecting suppliers and services), mostly with funds from the European Union. At the national level, all non-formal education providers and their programmes are registered (a registration database has been set up) and are subject to quality requirements in terms of content, quality of teaching, and material conditions of delivery.

In terms of centralized action, including the design and implementation of formal and non-formal education policy at the national level, the ŠMSM and subordinate institutions, such as the NŠA and the *L/NEŠA*, monitor trends in the development of arts-based education at the international and national levels. This includes recognizing the link between arts-based education and the needs of creative industries and other business stakeholders for creative and culturally competent workers and consumers. The ŠMSM keeps abreast of international trends, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization initiatives, and other

global efforts, organizes the participation of Lithuanian pupil populations in international research projects on academic achievement (e.g., Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), PISA, and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)), and considers the global and national economy, which emphasizes the improvement of cultural and creative competences and skills. Participation in international surveys of student achievement (PIRLS, PISA, TIMSS, etc.) has become an opportunity for the country's education administrators to review the state of education and set the direction of educational change.

Simultaneously, at the national level, the ŠMSM and its subordinate institutions can witness how the provision of arts-based education is distributed across different regions of Lithuania, how the inclusion policy is implemented in the country, how children with special educational needs (SEN), different socioeconomic statuses, and educational needs can access services, and how regions and municipalities implement arts-based education differently (e.g., the inclusion policy *No Child Left Behind*). The ŠMSM and its agencies collect national statistical data on levels of service provision in different regions, municipalities, and schools, identifying potential regional disparities. Studies on arts-based education and non-formal education are also commissioned at the national level.

Thus, according to the PEF, it is important to recognize not only the largest significant and radical changes, "high peaks", but also the "long tails", with extended periods of relative stability, some adjustments and minimal incremental changes, and low friction and resistance. As we have described above, the most dramatic change that shook the system was the introduction of the basket in school, non-formal, and higher education. Meanwhile, during periods of "long tails", efforts have been made to identify how these changes are working, what outcomes they are producing, and what needs to change. Measures to improve the basket/voucher system introduced in 2001 and to overcome its shortcomings and deficiencies could be seen as a "long tail" within the neoliberal reform. The money that follows the student system makes it difficult for rural schools to secure sufficient and stable funding. Meanwhile, urban schools with their overcrowded classes attract as many students as possible. In 2018, a new blended funding model was introduced, incorporating the idea of class vouchers, where money is calculated and allocated according to the number of students in a class. The state allocates about 80% of the school funding (the class voucher) to the school and the rest to the municipality. This new mixed funding system ensures a basket of basic education costs linked to the implementation of educational content. For each school, a formula calculates the actual number of hours needed to implement the curriculum based on the number of students in each class, which includes salaries calculated according to the number of teachers needed to implement the curriculum. Schools have some room for improvement in terms of increasing teachers' salaries, quality of education, and accessibility (e.g., for children from families with lower socioeconomic status), including in-school educational support for children with special needs. These measures have an impact on arts education by creating more favorable conditions for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (pupils with SEN, from families in rural areas, with lower socioeconomic status, etc.).

Another measure that belongs to the "long tail" period is the introduction of a model for a full-time salary system for teachers from 2018, which allows to increase the transparency of the teacher's work environment. According to the new model, the salary will no longer

be calculated per lesson. However, the workload for a full-time salary will be clearly defined per week and per year. The teacher's salary depends on the total number of hours worked, seniority, and level of qualifications. This system, which could be perceived as an application of a new governance approach within neoliberal reform, has introduced more transparency and clarity and aims to increase the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the system.

An example of creating a basis for adjusting and improving the non-formal education basket/voucher system could be the National Audit Report (Valstybės kontrolė, 2015) in 2015, which was seen as a form of providing policy feedback, revealing problems in the implementation of non-formal education policy, and revealing its pitfalls. Given the strong role and influence of the National Audit Office of Lithuania, the National Audit Report (Valstybės kontrolė, 2015) became a solid basis for policy improvement, guiding policy-makers on what adjustments needed to be made. The National Audit Report (Valstybės kontrolė, 2015) has identified negative trends and drawn attention to some systemic problems in non-formal education at the local government and municipal level: low diversity of educational service providers, inadequate financial and material support for non-formal education institutions, low pupil participation, and regional disparities. During the "long tail" period, the system tended to stabilize and regain the *status quo*, directing the further development of non-formal education toward reducing these negative reform tendencies. Additional inclusion, equity, and social justice measures were introduced during this period of stabilization. In addition to the concerns raised about regional disparities, low participation, and the accessibility of non-formal education services, measures created more favourable conditions for pupils with SEN to participate in non-formal education. According to the non-formal education basket/voucher methodology, a pupil with moderate, severe, and very severe SEN is allocated more funding.

4.5. Key stakeholders in arts education policy: lens of the advocacy coalition framework

For the analysis of arts-based education in Lithuania, the ACF can be useful to view the policy-making process as contradictory and full of tensions between the main actors, groups, and dueling coalitions in policy development. These groups of actors share common beliefs, have similar interests, and seek to coordinate their actions to influence public policy.

Moreover, we can identify groups of professionals (e.g., pedagogues, art teachers, and administrators) working in long-established traditional institutions (e.g., general schools, specialized non-formal educational institutions, art academies, and universities) representing beliefs about the "high" cultural value and status of certain classical and traditional art forms that help preserve a nation's identity and traditions and/or cultivate higher forms of aesthetic taste and culture (i.e., classical music and classical art education). They are struggling with new pressures to provide contemporary content and promote new arts, as well as to operate under neoliberal policies. Hence, they are coping with shrinking interest in traditional arts-based education among young people, declining student numbers, limited funding, increasing competition from new "players" in the education market, and the need to operate efficiently.

Local governments and municipalities are a specific coalition of actors responsible for various forms of education (formal and non-formal), including arts-based education. They face the challenges of effectively managing the funds from the student basket/voucher and local

funds, as well as the need to support the institutions they have established and to promote the local education market. They are coping with a shrinking education sector (*i.e.*, fewer students, fewer teachers), limited human and financial resources, socioeconomic problems in rural areas and small towns, an underdeveloped education market and entrepreneurial culture, and the limited financial capacity of parents to contribute financially to arts education.

These parents and pupils are important actors in arts-based education. Under the conditions of neo-liberal reforms, they choose educational services (*i.e.*, selecting general schools, specialized arts-based education schools, clubs, and other non-formal education activities), and they financially contribute to this provision, either by "carrying" money from the pupil's basket/voucher to institutions or by paying private providers. Pupils and parents have the belief and interest that arts-based education should not be limited to professional arts-based careers, but should develop creativity, be empowering, enriching, and enjoyable, and contribute to a nation's identity, holistic development, and emotional well-being.

Artists, arts-based education professionals, educational and social entrepreneurs working in private companies and non-governmental organizations represent innovators in the arts-based education and creative industries and promote a market-oriented approach. These groups have been empowered in Lithuania by neoliberal education reforms inviting them to offer private arts-based education services by diverting money from student baskets/vouchers and parents' money to private provision.

4.6. Policy problems, solutions, and political processes in arts education policy

Applying the MSF to understand the complex and ambiguous nature of the policy-making process, it is important to distinguish between the problem stream, the policy stream, and the political stream, and to assess the role of policy entrepreneurs in linking these different streams and exploiting the windows of opportunity that open up. According to Kingdon (2011), key actors define the problem stream. In arts-based education in Lithuania, these key actors are business stakeholders, arts-based education interest groups, and creativity professionals who express how creativity, imagination, and the creative thinking of workers are important for economic development (especially for creative industries), institutions in charge of professionalizing artists (arts-based academies, theatres, and music conservatories), and other stakeholders who show how an arts-based education is linked to the well-being of pupils and the education of the whole person, stressing the importance of a non-formal education in building creativity skills and showing that the system is not working properly.

Another issue regarding an arts-based education is the state's insufficient funding of non-formal education and the insufficient financial and territorial accessibility of non-formal education services for pupils. The policy stream tries to solve the problem when people with technical knowledge (ŠMSM, other government agencies, various experts) provide policy proposals and measures.

Regarding the problem stream, we should admit that in Lithuania, an arts-based education has never been "problematized" or actualized as a separate issue and was treated integrally with other fields. An arts-based education is problematized or presented as an issue along with other subjects; this has happened in all national curriculum updates. However, we should acknowledge that issues regarding an arts-based education are being problematized as the

need to educate for creativity. In public discussions about curriculum reform, business stakeholders emphasized the importance of creativity in students as future employees. However, creativity was not directly associated with artistic skills or imagination but was mostly seen as the ability to act independently or to pursue innovations. A similar interpretation of creativity is included in the updated national curriculum 2019–2023. Another case in which an arts-based education was touched on at the problem stream level was in the formulation of the broader issue: the need to reorganize and make more efficient and accessible a non-formal education in Lithuania. Again, an arts-based education did not emerge as a primary concern.

At the policy proposal level, the arts-based education stream has been included in the general framework of curricular updates. The position of arts-based education in Lithuania has been influenced by implementing the policy of reforming non-formal education. One of the first, most important documents regulating non-formal education was the Order on the Approval of the Concept of Non-formal Children's Education (E-tar.lt, 2005), which defined the aims, principles, object of education, competences to develop, outcome, organization, system, and financing of the educational process. The Order on the Approval of the Concept of Non-formal Children's Education (E-tar.lt, 2005) states that the non-formal education of children is a purposeful activity that helps them develop competences, to become a conscious personality capable of solving problems creatively and responsibly, to play an active role in society, and to adapt to an ever-changing environment. Notably, the revisions/amendments (E-seimas.lrs.lt, 2011) of the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania (E-seimas.lrs.lt, 1991) included another branch of non-formal education proposed in the Order on the Approval of the Concept of Non-formal Children's Education (E-tar.lt, 2005): non-formal education that complements formal education, the purpose of which is to systematically develop knowledge in a specific field, strengthen skills and abilities, and provide a person with additional subject competences within long-term programmes. Music, fine art, sport, and other schools can provide programmes to complement formal education. Non-formal education for children aims to meet the cognitive, educational, and expressive needs of pupils and to help them become active members of society. Non-formal arts-based educational institutions were included in the reorganization stream of governance and funding systems through the introduction of a student basket/voucher for non-formal education in 2011. Work is under way to further improve this mechanism.

A new trend in cultural education, including arts-based education in Lithuania in the last decade of education reform, is inter-ministerial, inter-sectoral cooperation and the involvement of the entire society in the cultural education of pupils. In 2018, the Order Approving the Concept of the Cultural Passport (E-tar.lt, 2018) was approved by two ministers: the Lithuanian Minister of Culture and the Lithuanian Minister of Education, Science and Sport. Significantly, the concept of cultural education was presented in the concept paper as a tool and purposeful activity to stimulate a person's cultural and educational needs, to develop a creative personality, to strengthen the habits of cognition and experience of culture, and to develop artistic skills and competences. Students can participate in the Cultural Passport Programme with a class or group, and students aged 16 and over can participate individually. Significantly, the Cultural Passport Programme was meant to ensure social justice and markedly contributed to the participation of all pupils in non-formal education and cultural

development, regardless of social status. The Cultural Passport Programme is implemented according to the following principles: 1) accessibility: it must reach every pupil; 2) inclusion: access to pupils who may have restrictions due to their place of residence, social situation, or disability; and 3) autonomy: the free choice to participate based on students' interests and needs. All cultural and artistic organizations that meet the established criteria can participate in the Cultural Passport Programme. The Cultural Passport Programme offers more than 4000 cultural events and educational activities. According to Ministry of Culture (Lithuania) data, in 2023, 23 647 educational events were organized, and students made 344 495 visits. All Lithuanian schools and eight Lithuanian schools abroad joined the Cultural Education System and used the Culture Passport Programme.

A significant measure of the 2021–2030 Education Development Programme (Smsm.lrv.lt, 2020) is the Millennium Schools Programme (Tūkstantmečio mokyklų programa, 2026) which aims to narrow the achievement gap and create an integrated, optimal, and quality education environment in each municipality. The programme aims to ensure that every child in Lithuania can learn in a modern and open school. The Millennium Schools Programme comprises school improvement areas that actively interact throughout the project: leadership in action, cultural education, inclusive education, STEM education, and networking.

Drawing on Kingdon's (2011) theory, the political stream is defined by election results, the composition of legislative bodies, and the prevailing national mood or public opinion concerning an issue. On the level of Lithuania's political stream, a government coalition of conservative and liberal parties in 2008–2012 promoted neoliberal policies in the education sector. They launched two important measures to reorganize the financing system of education by introducing student basket/vouchers at universities in 2009 and a basket for non-formal education for school pupils in 2011.

5. Discussion

This study is based on a critical perspective that applies different theoretical frameworks to discern whether the Lithuanian educational system currently supports an arts-based education that contributes to the development of creativity and other important skills for lifelong learning (Perso et al., 2011; Chishti & Jehangir, 2014; Saunders & Stinson, 2016; Stafford, 2019; Sokolowski, 2022). International research reveals that an arts-based education contributes to creativity in an integral way with other disciplines (Burnard et al., 2017). However, it should not be underestimated that an arts-based education alone (e.g., music, drama) also has its own distinctive methods and aspects in creativity and other skill development (Chishti & Jehangir, 2014; Griniuk, 2021; Corral et al., 2023). However, these arts-based education approaches thus far have not been fully and systematically exploited in Lithuania.

The analysis shows that the value of arts-based education within the national curriculum is rather limited. Similar concerns are voiced by other researchers who point out that an arts-based education can be found in the curriculum of almost every country in the world, but that the biggest problem lies in the gap between what national education policy makers declare about an arts-based education and what happens in schools. Bamford's (2009) study of 40 countries corroborates this issue. For example, although an arts-based education seems

to have gained a place in the Australian curriculum, researchers remain critical. Similar trends to those in Lithuania can be observed in Australia, where, as Saunders (2021) points out, an arts-based education is having a transformative impact on students' learning, teachers' pedagogical work, the socioemotional well-being of at-risk community members, and humanity in general. However, in many Australian schools, the place of the arts-based education in the national curriculum is under constant threat.

Therefore, our paper asks whether creativity is being sufficiently fostered in schools when an arts-based education is not receiving adequate recognition compared to other subjects. In this sense, we raise similar questions to those considered by Saunders (2021), Bamford (2009), and other scholars. Thus, despite the research supporting the assertion that an arts-based education improves skills, particularly literacy and numeracy, which raise students' academic performance, an arts-based education still must justify its place in national education systems (Saunders & Stinson, 2016). Perhaps this is also because there are too few systemic and longitudinal studies in countries, including Lithuania. Concerns are raised when some studies report contradictory results. Some of them found that an arts-based education had contributed to positive academic development, whereas others found no direct effect on students' academic progress (McClure, 2009). This situation justifies the need to develop these studies while discovering the other positive effects of an arts-based education on learners who have not yet been identified. There are also hopes that the role of an arts-based education will be greatly impacted by the growing sector of cultural and creative industries, inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral cooperation, the involvement of the entire society in the cultural education of pupils, and international studies such as PISA.

Our policy analysis research enables us to formulate recommendations for education policy-makers, curriculum developers, researchers, etc. Based on the ACF, national and regional policy-makers are encouraged to identify and engage stakeholders who can contribute to the formulation and implementation of policy changes. The traditional network of stakeholders (*i.e.*, schools, parents, students, and educators) could be expanded by inviting professional artists and representatives of cultural organizations and creative industries to contribute to arts-based education, and by creating new forms and platforms of collaboration – forums and consultations, working groups, and administrative and financial support for arts and culture professionals – to implement arts and creativity education into schools. The administrative and fiscal decentralization reform in Lithuania defined municipalities as key policy makers and gave them the responsibility of providing quality, inclusive formal and non-formal education services, promoting the diversification of the non-formal education, and fostering public-private partnerships. In terms of social inclusion, the accessibility issues of a non-formal arts education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds such students with SEN, low socio-economic status, and from rural areas should become a subject for new policy development. Partnerships between schools, social service providers, and non-governmental organizations could be encouraged to promote the inclusion of disadvantaged communities.

In order to implement the necessary policy improvements, it would be important to provide professional training for policy-makers, inviting them to learn from the best practices of other regions and countries. From the perspective of national policy making, there should be more measures to carry out the continuous evaluation of municipalities' performance

in providing educational services, with a focus on inclusiveness, accessibility, and quality. Examples of such evaluations are the reports of the National Audit Office of Lithuania, annual education reports, reports of the *LINEŠA*, etc. Analyzing arts education from a historical perspective uses the approach of historical institutionalism in public administration, which highlights the importance of path dependencies and the interplay of tradition and innovation. When doing so, it is important for policy makers at the national and local levels to preserve the traditional forms of arts education (*i.e.*, music, folk dance, visual arts), which have been promoted in Lithuania for many decades and are accessible to broad groups of students as mass education. Simultaneously, they should develop contemporary forms of arts – the audiovisual and digital arts, as well as the intersection of arts and STEM – to meet the needs of the 21st century's economy, culture, and society.

6. Conclusions

The development of the arts-based education system has been influenced by the historical context and political decisions oriented towards neoliberal approaches, including decentralization through funding, participation, and governance of the system by various actors. The insights gained from the theoretical framework of historical institutionalism enabled the authors of this article to identify historically developed path dependencies that prioritize institutionalized, elitist forms of traditional arts-based education, such as music schools and to maintain centralized funding systems that allocate money from national and local authorities to long-established institutions of arts-based education.

The PEF illuminated the reform of the national curriculum in the 1990s, the neoliberal policy of commodifying education, privatization, diversification of providers and services, increased emphasis on clients' choice and their financial participation, administrative and fiscal decentralization (with the introduction of pupil/student basket/vouchers in general, non-formal and higher education) as turning points and critical junctures ("tall peaks") that fundamentally changed the entire structure of the education system in Lithuania. Throughout these radical changes, an arts-based education has been embedded in, and indirectly affected by, wider reforms and changes but has not been distinguished or prioritized.

The notion of stable periods and incremental change, referred to as "long tails", illustrates how radical neoliberal reforms have been slowed by the inertia created by the historic patterns such as strong institutionalization, centralization, and the lack of competence in decentralized self-governance. The negative effects of radical neoliberal reforms have been corrected by inclusive and justice-oriented policy adjustments to address inequalities related to special educational needs, regional disparities, accessibility, and the socioeconomic status of pupils' families.

The theoretical approach of the ACF allowed us to recognize different groups of actors with their interests and values and to grasp the historical development of arts-based education as an arena of tensions, struggle, and coalitions. In addition to the theory of historical institutionalism and the PEF, the ACF reveals another dynamic of policy development – how heterogeneous groups of actors (pupils and parents, art teachers, educational administrators, entrepreneurs in the educational market of arts-based education) participated in the process

of introducing neoliberal policies, changes in education funding, and the commodification of education.

Based on the MSF, the analysis reveals that, unfortunately, during more than 30 years of Lithuanian independence, arts-based education in Lithuania has not been placed at the center of policy-making and remains at the periphery of policy action. Instead, it operates under the influence of general educational and cultural policy decisions, and its value within the national curriculum is rather limited. Pupils who have chosen arts subjects take special exams if they plan to study arts-related degree programmes. Unfortunately, an arts-based education does not formally add much value to pupils who have chosen other areas. The strong focus on examinations and testing in the Lithuanian education system results in a curriculum that is overloaded with themes, leaving teachers no time to develop creativity. An arts-based education becomes secondary, despite the clear socioemotional and creative benefits it brings to pupils' development. The research generates new knowledge and valuable insights for the development of new policy strategies in this area.

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