Arts and Well-being: From Cultural Rights to Capabilities

Kai Lehikoinen

This keynote examines the relationship between cultural rights, cultural education, and well-being through the capability approach of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. While participation in cultural life is recognised as a fundamental human right, formal rights alone do not ensure that children and young people have genuine opportunities to participate meaningfully and equitably. The keynote asks what conditions **enable or constrain young people's opportunities** to engage with the arts, develop their creative capacities, exercise agency, and experience belonging. Rather than treating the arts primarily as an intervention expected to produce predetermined benefits, it considers how cultural participation may contribute to well-being while recognising the intrinsic value of artistic and cultural engagement. It argues for a shift from asking simply **"Do the arts improve well-being?"** to asking **"Under what conditions can engagement with the arts expand young people's opportunities to participate, create, and flourish?"**

Bio

Dr. Kai Lehikoinen is Professor of Dance Pedagogy at Uniarts Helsinki's Theatre Academy, where he is responsible for the MA Programme in Dance Pedagogy. His research focuses on dance pedagogy, socially engaged arts, arts in health and care, and the changing roles of artists in society. He has contributed to international research, policy, and cross-sector collaboration in these fields. His Routledge monograph, *Creativity, Society and the Role of Socially Engaged Art in Higher Arts Education*, examines socially engaged arts as a subject of study and the societal role of arts universities.