EUROPEAN EXPERT NETWORK ON CULTURE (EENC)

OMC Group on Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue: Reflection Paper

by Chris Torch

EENC Paper, September 2012

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This document has been prepared by Chris Torch on behalf of the European Expert Network on Culture (EENC), at the request of Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission (DG EAC).

The EENC was set up in 2010 at the initiative of DG EAC, with the aim of contributing to the improvement of policy development in Europe. It provides advice and support to DG EAC in the analysis of cultural policies and their implications at national, regional and European levels. The EENC involves 17 independent experts and is coordinated by Interarts and Culture Action Europe. For additional information see www.eenc.eu.

About the author

Chris Torch is Senior Associate at Intercult, a production and resource unit focused on culture, ideas and the arts. Founded in 1996, it is a publically-financed institution, based in Stockholm, and a designated Europe Direct office, managed within the institution's European Resource Center for Culture, since 2009. Intercult focuses to a large degree on international exchange and co-production with the European Neighborhood, reflected in the project CORNERS, launched in may 2011. (www.intercult.se/corners)

Apart from large-scale project design, Torch plays a role in developing intercultural politics. He lectures regularly and is currently on the Board of Trustees for the European Museum Forum, a Board member of River//Cities, former vice president for Culture Action Europe (2006-2010), a member of the Steering Group for the Platform for Intercultural Europe and an Advisor to the campaign *we are more*.

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Background

> "*We are now living in the generation of what Martin Luther King called "four hundred years of unpaid wages". Those wages are now coming due. And the question is: what will the currency be that they're paid in? There's a lot of pain, aggression and violence behind our comfortable standard of living. People do not know how to articulate what they are now feeling in this society. The absence of articulation is what creates violence. If you can't express something, or if your voice is unheard, you of course resort to violence. The ability to move against violence is the ability to create forms of expression, where nobody has to be killed in order to say something.*"

> Peter Sellars
> opera and stage director, festival director

The European Union provides an excellent opportunity for re-thinking mobility of people and experience - if it is envisioned as **a cultural project**. Focusing only on the exchange of goods and administrative tasks, issues of mobility and migration will not be met.

The formation of an OMC Group with a priority towards **Interculture and Diversity** is an important step in this process of re-defining European policy exchange. There is a great deal of shared practice and - more importantly - shared challenges. Migration within Europe and migration to Europe from other continents is changing the population, its loyalties and references.

Migration is the major cultural and political force presently affecting our world. Millions of people are on the move. Mobility - and therefore practical interculturalism - increases. Mixed couples and their children, second and third generation immigrants with one foot in each culture, are common expressions of global mobility in all European societies. This is a phenomenon that enriches.

At the same time, the integration of immigrants into mainstream society has caused intense debate since years. What is an appropriate cultural response?

A Short History of Cultural Diversity in Europe

Abrupt changes of population, including forced or voluntary migration during and following WWII, transformed into a massive movement of employment forces during the 60's and early 70's. People moved to where work was offered. They were

welcomed because they were needed, especially in the north of Europe, where economic development was rapid. Integration through participation in the labour market and public education was relatively smooth. What's more: the great majority of the mobile workers were born in a European country. Cultural differences - while challenging - were not major obstacles.

During the 70's and into the 90's, new faces of migration began showing up. Political refugees, often well-educated and skilled, came from repressive countries and contributed what they could to their new society, sometimes with an eye to the mother country (Latin America, Turkey, Eastern Europe). They had often social and cultural networks which helped them through the tough times of adapting to a foreign home.

The post-colonial European countries (UK, France, The Netherlands, Spain, Portugal among others) were in the same time period feeling the consequences of centuries of cultural clash and domination. Relations carried on. People moved to their families and to the jobs. The colonies came home.

More recently, an increase of "catastrophe" migration, due to both war and environmental disaster, has brought a new mixture of both culture and religion into Europe during the last 20 years. Both legal and clandestino.

The consequences of these waves of migration are felt most strongly in our cities. The urban envirnment is in the process of radical transformation, not because of population statistics or ethnicity, but because of the multiplicity of choice and expression deriving from migration.

Negotiating Cultural Diversity

In a study commissioned by a consortium of foundations[1] **Transatlantic Trends: Immigration (2010)**, respondents in a cross section of European countries were asked to evaluate their governments' policies on integration, and "results suggest that many governments are not seen to be doing enough."

> "When asked whether immigration enriches their country's culture with new customs and ideas or negatively affects their national culture, most countries had a positive view of immigration's cultural effects in 2009 and 2010. The exception was the United Kingdom, where a plurality of 48% in 2010 said that immigration negatively affects British culture. Though the other countries in the survey seem

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[1] *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration* is a project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the Compagnia di San Paolo, and the Barrow Cadbury Trust, with additional support from the Fundación BBVA.

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to have a positive opinion of immigration's cultural effects, they are less positive in 2010 than in 2009. France (68% to 58%), Spain (61% to 55%), and Italy (54% to a plurality of 49%)."

The same study focuses on "perceptions of integration":

"Generally speaking, Europeans had fairly negative views of the state of immigrant integration in their countries. Spain was the only country in Europe where a slight majority (54%) felt that immigrants are integrating well. On the other hand, half of the Italians (50%) and more than half of the French (54%), Germans (53%), and British (52%) felt that immigrants were integrating poorly or very poorly into society. The Dutch were the most pessimistic, with 60% saying that immigrants were integrating poorly into Dutch society."

"Celebrating Diversity" or "Cultivating Multiple Identities"?

There have been innumerable policy initiatives focusing on cultural diversity and empowering new citizens during the last years. A few of those that I personally have had contact with:

- Sweden's Year of Multiculturalism 2006.
- EU Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008.
- The Council of Europe White Paper on Diversity (2008)
- The Rainbow Paper: a study focusing on turning practice into policy (2009-ongoing)
- Decibel (UK) - a multicultural arts programme designed by the Arts Council
- Kosmopolis (NL) - a flagship project connecting several Dutch cities

… and many many more, a national and local levels, throughout Europe.

The majority of policy initiatives, both nationally and trans-nationally have been brought about in an atmosphere of "multiculturalism" - minority communities and their artistic representatives put pressure on to be recognized, made visible and given serious resources. The target groups were "the others", a celebration of the multiple sub-cultures in any given country, and especially - again - in the larger urban areas, where immigrant communties were gathered.

But one can see this development also as a source of fragmentization. Many small communities trying to find their separate voices. And although the basic reasons for this fundamental desire to be visible should not be questioned, the result was that "multiculturalism" never became a common social or cultural objective for the greater part of the society. Isolation and conflict seemed rather to grow.

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Defining and implementing "intercultural" policy is still in process. This is an essential shift of policy reflections: from multiculturalism to interculturalism.

It is in the vacuum between these two approaches from a policy perspective that the perceptions on integration (shown earlier) are allowed to grow. Citizens in EU member states seem to be losing confidence in integration because they still perceive migration as threatening, rather than enriching.

Our world is changing constantly – and we need to excercise our capacity for change. Confrontation and negotiation with other realities is excellent preparation for meeting an unknown future. When the legendary theatremaker Peter Brook gatherered his first intercultural company years ago, he dreamed of "making culture in the sense that **yoghurt** is culture". He initiated a transformation, an ongoing fermentation of ideas and perspectives, changing not only the participants (citizens) but also the context in which they worked (Europe).

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What kind of intercultural actions and programmes can meet the challenge of **multiple identities**? Each of us has an ethnic background, maybe a national citizenship but we also have personal identities as parents, as believers, as men or women. We have professional identities and cultural identities. We share hobbies and interests in sub-cultural groups. These different identities are in continuous negotiation and none of them alone are sufficient to define a person. We are at the same time Calabrese, Italian and European. We are both father and lover. We are both bankers and dog-owners. We weave our way through this complicated map and we relate to one another from various positions, none of them fixed.

The Future of Diversity

Our European cities continue to cultivate diversity, all the percentages and statistics tell us this. The "critical mass" of immigrants and their offspring - in schools, at workplaces, in neighborhoods - has been reached in most European urban centers. It is a political, economic, social and above all cultural question of utmost importance. Civil and governmental initiatives will continue, especially at the local and regional level, to strenghten the voices of our new citizens.

But the most important actions to be taken will focus on "shared space". In order for us to share a space, we must first frame it, clarify it, map it. We must overview and at the

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same time explore the details. We must both observe and interact. *Intercultural exchange* is mutual transformation.

We might define our task as creating conditions for sharing space.

Central Questions

What kinds of **PLACES** are needed?
- cultural spaces
- public spaces
- digital spaces
- schools and workplaces

What kind of **COMPETENCE** is needed?
- training
- study travel
- practical experience
- social skills
- increased empathy

What kinds of **NETWORKS** are needed?
- local community associations (audiences)
- international (competence and shared projects)
- national (competence and shared projects)

What kinds of **RESOURCES** are needed?
- subsidies
- investments
- special programs
- technical resource centers
- marketing/communication resource centers

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Some Possible Approaches:
How to turn intercultural action into policy?
How to make policy which supports intercultural action?

1. Existing Events and Organisations
One approach is to focus on existing events (festivals, seasons, debate series) which happen already and have a strong real or potential intercultural element. These events are often already run by engaged cultural operators and artists, even community organisations, participatory and user-friendly. They need support and encouragement. They have difficulty receiving sufficient national or local support because of their innovative and sub-cultural character.

2. Media and Awareness
Projects, processes and exchanges which already have strong 'intercultural dialogue' elements could be offered incentive grants to considerably augment their documentation and visibility. Writers, journalists, documentalists and others could be commissioned to publish, translate, or produce documentation to be diffused among target groups.

3. International Mobility and Intercultural Competence
Support could be given to projects and structures which create synergies between artists engaged in international mobility (tours and research) and local communities. Artists should share with one another - and with their target audiences - the intercultural competence developed on foreign soil, transferring it to a local, multi-ethnic context.

4. Education and the Arts
It is essential to provide support for innovative collaborations between schools and cultural projects, so that intercultural practice filters down into the earliest stages of development.
   This could include:
   ♦ projects between children and older generations
   ♦ collaborations between cultural projects and internet, especially in schools
   ♦ training programs for teachers and other educational professionals

5. Other Cross Sectoral Actions
Innovative cross-sectoral collaborations, between the cultural sector and e.g. social issues, employment, science, business, health, youth, environment etc could be encouraged. Such links can contribute to removing the "stigma" of cultural diversity - that it is about "them" and not "us".

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6. Intercultural Meeting Places and Laboratories

To cultivate new approaches, we need artistic laboratories, "greenhouses". Such production centres probably exist outside traditional institutions. Here is a potential key: ongoing relationships between independent endeavours (sub-cultural and flexible) and cultural institutions (mainstream and sustained). One could also transform cultural centres and community houses into "intercultural meeting places", rather than mere hosting sites for mono-cultural events. This requires training, renovation/re-cycling of physical resources (buildings) and new communication strategies.

7. Sharing Skills

There might be support for "mentoring programs" that allow artists and cultural operators with competence in one sector to mentor and transfer knowledge to people working in other sectors.

8. Audience Development

Support must be given to audience development programmes, focusing on diversity of ethnicity, age, gender and cultural identity. Diverse people need to share the same room sometimes, to inspire social cohesion and democratic inclusion. The Arts could play a central role: citizenship and participation are stimulated by common values that are developed, not enforced or taught.