

# Interculturalism: Art and Policy



## Summary Report on the Fourth Practice Exchange for Intercultural Capacity-Building

**15th -16th December 2010, Sidcup, London, UK**

*This event was organised by Platform for Intercultural Europe and Border Crossings  
in association with Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance.*



**PLATFORM FOR  
INTERCULTURAL EUROPE**

*In collaboration with*

**Border Crossings**

*and*

**Rose Bruford College**  
*of Theatre & Performance*

## Overview

The Fourth Practice Exchange for Intercultural Capacity-Building was held on **15th -16th December 2010 in Sidcup, London, UK**. It was organised by Platform for Intercultural Europe and Border Crossings in association with Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance.

The Practice Exchange involved **53 participants** from fields of arts and education, from diverse cultural backgrounds in the UK, along with guests from Austria, Belgium, Slovenia, Sweden and Italy. Artists' intercultural work with ethnic minorities was showcased and discussed by participants made up of theatre practitioners, art consultants, anti-discrimination activists and academics.

Professor **Nesta Jones** (Head of Research at Rose Bruford) and **Sabine Frank** (Secretary General of the Platform for Intercultural Europe) welcomed participants and provided the context for the event. The first day presented a range of diversity arts practice; the second day provided viewpoints from the perspectives of policy-making, academics and anti-discrimination. **Michael Walling** (Artistic Director of Border Crossings and Visiting Professor at Rose Bruford) provided an overview of his work and the tensions between art forms and policy. He introduced the **guiding questions** for the event, which were:

- Does the intercultural work of the cultural sector transform into social and political progress?
- What can cultural work contribute to civil society that other agencies cannot?
- What is the level of political awareness in the cultural field?
- Are there true synergies between cultural/artistic work and awareness raising/political campaign work or is cultural work insular?
- How do intercultural arts relate to campaigning for equal rights, social justice, and anti-discrimination?
- How can policy stimulate intercultural dialogue through artistic work?
- Is there a specific role for European institutions in the development of intercultural dialogue?
- Does the work being done in intercultural dialogue represent a patchwork of efforts or a unified social movement?

**Jatinder Verma** (founder and Director of Tara Arts) gave a keynote presentation, outlining the development of diversity arts practice and intercultural theatre from the 1960s, in the context of mass migration to Britain from the Caribbean and South Asia and the campaigns for civil rights and equity. **David Tse Ka Shing** (Director of Chinatown Arts Space and founding Director of Yellow Earth Theatre) spoke about his work with British East Asian communities. **John Martin** (Director of Pan Intercultural Arts) presented his approaches to working with refugee communities. **Gabrielle Lobb** (from Polygon Arts and Freelance Educator at the British Museum) and **Femi Elufowoju Jr** (Associate Artist at the Almeida Theatre and founder of Tiata Fahodzi) shared their experiences of dialogues between diverse communities and the cultural sector. **Dan Rebellato** (Professor of Contemporary Theatre at Royal Holloway University of London) spoke of the impact of globalisation on theatre. **Hardish Virk** (Audience Development Consultant, and director of Multi-Arts Nation) shared his experiences of audience development and research with South Asian Communities. **Ansel Wong** (Managing Director at Tsingtac Associates Limited) spoke of the need to claim public space for minorities and challenge exclusion, with particular reference to carnival. **Graham Jeffery** (researcher and academic at the University of the West of Scotland) discussed the contradictions of policy that artists grapple with and the need for effective and hybrid forms of evaluative processes.

The presentations were detailed and they are represented as fully as possible here, as they provide a valuable insight into practice and personal experiences of cultural practitioners working in the UK working with intercultural issues.

## Key Points from the Practice Exchange

While the guiding questions provided a useful starting point for the Practice Exchange, the presentations and discussions diverged widely, covering a whole range of examples of intercultural work. However, some key points have arisen from the two days.

### ***Campaigning for equal rights, justice and anti-discrimination***

- While much has been achieved in the field by culturally diverse, independent arts organisations and by many outstanding artists of non-British origins, **equity in public funding distribution remains an issue**, as does access to national cultural institutions. The struggle for free, full and equal participation of all in cultural life irrespective of their colour, origin or beliefs carries on – and is indeed sharpened in the current climate of ‘austerity’.
- The key protagonists in organisations dealing with diversity face the challenge of pursuing the cause of equity without suffocating in a “tick-box” world of classification and the expectation that they will represent or exclusively serve “their community”. The **multiplicity of identities** in the 21<sup>st</sup> century UK resist easy definition and challenge ideas of national identity.
- With the exception of the Scottish Artists Union (specific to Scotland), there is **no national representation or lobbying body for the arts**, which also campaign on political issues – though some individuals may be members of trade unions such as BECTU (the UK's media and entertainment trade union). It was pointed out that networks of activists had existed in the past (late 1970s through to the late 1990s), through groups such as the Association of Community Artists, the Shelton Trust and the Campaign for Cultural Democracy, though there exists barely any documentation of [this history](#).<sup>1</sup>
- It may be argued that many of the campaign aims of these organisations were indeed fulfilled, and thus the flow of activism decreased: in the 1990s, funding for the arts exponentially increased, and significant strategic bodies such as the Arts Council were restructured to take account of demands (shifting away from an approach based on art forms to multi-disciplinary teams with specialist interests in audience development, participation, engagement, arts and health, disability, diversity, business partnerships and so on). Local authorities employed arts development teams as part of their local government provision (whereas 30 years ago there were none). Major arts institutions looked beyond their buildings and deployed outreach and education teams in the community. ‘Fine’ artists began to describe their work (whether related to a gallery space or not) as ‘socially engaged’. However, in the current climate of austerity and retrenchment, much of this may disappear and the **vital development and campaigning role again falls back upon the artists** themselves.
- Participants felt there was a strong political awareness in the field (of UK government structures and strictures). **Cultural work was not insular**. They expressed to each other a clear understanding of the impact of their actions and their projects - if not an easily recognisable way of measuring impact for policy makers. This awareness though did not necessarily translate into areas of policy, action or even solidarity. It was pointed out that there had been a high level of competition over funds between arts organisations in the UK. In recent years, there has not been much cross-sectoral collaboration, or a common united voice to articulate the value of the work.
- The advent of **social networking technologies**, and their wholesale adoption by young people, offered new and exciting opportunities to advocate, to campaign, to communicate and to network. However, many participants felt there needed to be more advocacy - through the production and dissemination of documentation through as wide a range of media as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Owen Kelly's book on the development of the Community Arts movement in the UK, 'Community, Art and the State, Storming the Citadels', published by Comedia in 1984, is one of the few existing examples.

The achievements of practitioners in diversity arts and the positive experiences of intercultural dialogue were hidden from sight, away from the mainstream. There is a need to celebrate and promote these achievements.

- There was discussion about the **role of conflict in shaping and defining culture** – in that creativity can come out of tension and difficulty and struggle. It was noted that creativity often doesn't come out of simple situations '*where everyone knows what they're supposed to be doing*'. It comes out of a contested situation where people are wrestling with issues and ideas. Indeed, it may be said that conflict is a prerequisite for creative practice. Much of the work of diversity arts over the years had precisely engaged with these struggles for equal rights, social justice, and anti-discrimination. In terms of advocacy perhaps this is an appropriate time to recall what Frederick Douglass, an escaped slave and social reformer in 19<sup>th</sup> century United States of America, once said: "*Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.*"

### **Social and political engagement**

- The experiences shared by participants revealed that work in the field of Intercultural Dialogue was **a positive force in breaking down barriers and prejudices**. As was stated by Jatinder Verma, cultural work had the ability to engage the heart as well as the head.

- Participants felt that **all arts practice was intercultural** on a number of levels – through negotiations about identity and practice, in devising and producing art with a diverse range of people (class, age, race, experience), then in engaging with an audience and in reflecting on their reaction to it. In this sense, social and political engagement was an essential feature of the work, as cultural workers have the tools for attitudinal change.

- Globalisation and rapid shifts in forms of communication require us to develop **a greater engagement with complexity, uncertainty and the unknown**. Intercultural work is a way of understanding and dealing with the impact of change and the increasingly complex world we live in. This is particularly true of life in urban centres, where cities produce (and encourage) more fluid identities and the characteristics of human populations change fast.

- Intercultural work is a way of '**experiencing the Other**', eroding stereotypes and increasing understanding and empathy through personal engagement. We are changed by our interaction with other people. Exposure to other cultures and different life experiences enriches our own lives and perspectives. Our social and intellectual mobility is increased through this stimulus.

- The idea of '*curiosity*' surfaced in several discussions – it was suggested that if we can **increase curiosity in 'minority' cultures** among 'host' or dominant culture, then we will break down prejudices. If on the other hand we try to tackle prejudices directly, they might reinforce and dialogue will not take place.

- Culture in the UK is the result of **a historical process of fusion** – a country where '*the favourite food is pizza and a curry*', where '*the language comes from Latin and Saxon and Hindi*', and where the music comes from both the Blues and from Celtic folk traditions. Intercultural work recognises and celebrates this.

- Artistic work has many layers. It is about perception and reaction, narrative and sense-making, human relationships and emotion, and about questioning and playing with the rules rather than blindly following them. Participants and presenters suggested that these are precisely the qualities needed if we are **to navigate the currents of transition and** change towards a more sustainable, effective and fulfilling global culture.

- The '**gatekeepers**' (whether in government or in funding bodies or national institutions) **need to be engaged with** in a more effective way, perhaps by setting specific aims and objectives. For example, one aim might be to encourage a broader curiosity about 'world performance', as it was felt there was a dominance of Eurocentric-European-American playwrights in theatre in the UK. As one participant commented: "*A quarter of the world's humanity is Chinese. How many stories are not being told? Why would I not want to at least*

*hear some of a quarter of the world's experience of what it means to be a human being. Let's be curious about the world, let's not just listen to the world as dictated to us by a very small clique of people."*

### **The role for European institutions in the development of intercultural dialogue**

- As was pointed out early in the event, the UK can be insular, highly parochial and inward looking – 'Little Englanders'. People in the UK do not automatically see themselves as part of Europe - in conversation, people will refer to 'on the continent' or 'in Europe', as if the British Isles are separated from Europe by one thousand miles of water, rather than (at its narrowest) a mere thirty four kilometres. Participants felt that **engagement with artists, agencies and organisations working across Europe provided valuable insights** and examples to learn from. These opportunities are greatly welcomed. However, engagement with the political institutions of the European Union and their role in cultural-policy-making is another step, which is not easily taken.
- There is ongoing confusion between definitions of art and culture in policy, which need to be untangled. In some respects, the policy statements from funding bodies can be very broad (and vague) and '*all things to all people*'. The current [DCMS policy statement](#)<sup>2</sup> was pointed to, as one example, being reduced in effect to four points, which some participants felt '*might as well simply say, Art is a good thing*'. Artists felt they were often spending inordinate amounts of time on constructing reductive policy statements rather than creating work. On the other hand, the DCMS have responsibility for broadcasting - this is a dominant area of cultural policy, where there are indeed highly detailed policy documents. There is a **pertinent role for EU institutions in facilitating the sharing of good practice** in policy from across Europe, providing different and new approaches.
- Participants felt that policy often focused on how well something was managed rather than asking, '*Was it any good?*' Participants wondered if there were ways to evaluate which didn't involve monetary (or other quantitative) measures? There needed to be **hybrid and more sophisticated ways to express why the arts matter**: the value of arts in terms of education, of giving the voiceless a voice, of the health and well-being benefits it bestows etc.
- There were discussions on **questions of evidence**: How can the claims that the arts make for themselves as being '*transformational or revolutionary or deeply empowering*' be corroborated? Many grand statements are made, by a range of institutions including the Arts Council itself as a justification for funding. [How do we know any of that is true?](#)<sup>3</sup> Exposure to examples of **models of practice** from outside of the UK could provide inspiration and knowledge on how to navigate these shifting cross-cultural tides of opinion.
- Some participants suggested that the challenge was to make the huge demographic shifts of the last 30 years visible in the governance bodies and leadership positions of the cultural flagship institutions and touring theatre companies: **equitable representation of diversity in positions of power, influence, and advocacy**. Again, a non-UK perspective and experience on how other institutions had tackled these issues would be greatly welcomed.
- Participants recognised that there was a gap between the language used by those working in policy and those working in cultural organisations - this created a barrier to forming effective partnerships. This kind of Practice Exchange (in Sidcup) provided an opportunity to learn more about the impact of policy on their work. Having opportunities to engage with transversal, international networks (such as the Platform for Intercultural Europe) and learn from them

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<sup>2</sup> Our mission is to realise the nation's creative and sporting potential and our goals are to offer world class culture, media and sport, to unlock talent and to improve well-being. We aim to improve the quality of life for all through cultural and sporting activities, to support the pursuit of excellence and to champion the tourism, creative and leisure industries. DCMS, July 2010

<sup>3</sup> There are some interesting reflections on this to be found in this article at - [http://twentiethcentury.com/saul/who\\_will\\_be\\_transformed.htm](http://twentiethcentury.com/saul/who_will_be_transformed.htm)

were regarded as essential. Policy makers and cultural practitioners needed to come together more.

## 6. Recommendations

Overview of suggestions for actions made by participants or synthesized from the discussion:

| Recommendations  | Field of Action             | Addressees  |
|--|-----------------------------|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Create and share the language:</b> Research commonalities and differences between the language of cultural policy and that of cultural practice. This could be done by means of a series of workshops over one year with the aim of publishing a glossary of useful or new terminology. Develop new partner relationships to deliver these workshops.</li> </ul>   | Research                    | Civic organisations,<br>Researchers   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Build on good practice:</b> Support documentation and dissemination of good practice in intercultural dialogues.</li> </ul>  | Research                    | Platform for Intercultural Europe with its resource collection on Intercultural Dialogue "Panorama" |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Create and share the conversation:</b> Commission a model project with cultural practitioners, which can demonstrate 'best practice' to policy makers. This can result in an annual publication for dissemination on the web or in Internet forums –over a three-year period.</li> </ul>   | Cultural Practice           | Arts Agencies,<br>Funding Bodies,<br>Civic Organisations  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Create and share the ideas:</b> Help uncover and develop arguments about what the arts can offer to the making of intercultural societies, and their benefits to community cohesion. This can be done through seeking partners for publication, seminars and documentation.</li> </ul>   | Cultural Practice, research | Practitioners and researchers from the arts and from other fields                                   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Establish comprehensive evaluation models:</b> Studies of cultural impact have been either very quantitative and data driven (numbers of participants, age, social class, ethnicity, qualifications achieved) or qualitative (utilising people's stories and experiences). Both forms of analysis need to be combined in order to make evidence robust.</li> </ul> | Research, policy-making     | Research institutes and their funding bodies  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Create and share the evidence:</b> Examine the need for a 'think tank' on culture and evaluation – what exists out there, if anything? What could be brought into being to gather trans-national data from local sources? Seek to create an alliance with</li> </ul>   | Research, policy-making     | European Commission,<br><br>National policy makers,   |

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|---|---|--|
| <p>academics (who are exploring in the arenas of social sciences, arts and humanities) for the establishment of effective methods of evaluation.</p>  |   | <p>Academics,<br/>Civic Organisations</p>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reduce and navigate policy incongruence:</b> There are many layers of governmental policy and many different policies of individual artistic or cultural organisations. They are rarely congruent and practitioners experience them as difficult. While policy-makers and lobbyists should work to ensure more coherence, practitioners should pick what policy allows them to claim support for their work.</li> </ul> | <p>Policy-making,<br/>cultural practice</p>           | <p>EU and national<br/>policy-makers,<br/>Civil servants,<br/>Cultural practitioners</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Change institutions:</b> Institutions have to change internally before they can be more inclusive of the diverse communities around them.</li> </ul>  | <p>Policy-making,<br/>organisational<br/>practice</p> | <p>Cultural Institution<br/>and their funding<br/>bodies</p>                             |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Strengthen synergies and mobilisation capacities of cultural organisations:</b> Smaller organisations need to form stronger networks around specific goals related to policy or funding at a local, regional, national or even European level.</li> </ul>   | <p>Networking</p>                                     | <p>Local, national and<br/>European Civic<br/>Organisations</p>                          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Build alliances:</b> In times of public funding cuts, grass-roots organisations must take recourse to greater inventiveness and solidarity. They should emphasise working in partnership, sharing resources as well as intelligence and developing a collective voice to lobby commissioners of cultural projects, funders and other stakeholders.</li> </ul>   | <p>Networking</p>                                     | <p>Grass-roots, local,<br/>national and EU civic<br/>organisations</p>                   |

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