



Intercultural Dialogue as an objective in the EU Culture Programme: Summary of Study and Recommendations

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"There are a thousand ways of understanding intercultural dialogue."
(project manager of a cooperation project)

Summary

Intercultural dialogue is one of three specific objectives of the Culture (2007-2013) Programme of the European Union. How has this objective been translated into the practice of funded projects and organisations? This is the question which the Platform for Intercultural Europe and Culture Action Europe, both organisations with a key interest in the topic and a track record of advocacy work at EU level, have investigated with a view to contributing to the European Commission's review of the Programme and the preparation of its next phase beginning in 2014¹. A draft version of this document was informally discussed with the EC Culture Programme Unit in April 2010. Once both organisations behind the study have consulted their members on its content, a final version will be submitted to the public consultation on the Culture Programme review due to open in the autumn of 2010.

The scope and methodology of the study

Intercultural dialogue is an objective in 201 cooperation projects and work programmes funded under the EU Culture Programme in 2008 and 2009 according to information made available by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency². These amount to approximately 73% of all selected beneficiaries for the mentioned budget years.

The analysis was carried out with questionnaires and additional selective telephone interviews with project managers. Out of the 201 beneficiaries, 60 completed the questionnaires (representing a response rate of approximately 30%). 24 out of the 60 respondents were then asked to take part in phone interviews – 11 interviews have been carried out to date.

1. This research was carried out by Romanian cultural policy expert, Bianca Floarea, with the help of Culture Action Europe Project Officer Ewa Majczak. Their draft report and the reactions of consultant Chrissie Tiller and Yvette Vaughan-Jones from Visiting Arts, UK, were discussed at a seminar on 8th March together with members of the Platform's steering group as well as Culture Action Europe representatives. This document was subsequently drafted by Sabine Frank, Secretary General of the Platform, with input from the two researchers, and steering group members Elii Borchgrevink and Niels Righolt. The full study report and the final version of this document will be published in July 2010.

2. The Executive Agency was not able to make data available for the budget year 2007, so the study could not cover this year. Moreover, the analysis for 2008 only took into account strand 1 of the programme, i.e. cooperation projects, because the Executive Agency could not provide information on the work programmes of the organisations supported under strand 2. For the same reason, the 2009 budget year only includes information about the annual strand 2 grants, without the 3-year framework partnership agreements.

Research questions

Respondents were asked to explain in writing with regard to their project or work programme:

- why intercultural dialogue is an aim
- what intercultural dialogue means practically
- who the dialoguing partners are
- what activities reflect the pursuit of intercultural dialogue
- what positive or negative results these activities have
- what learning the activities offer
- if or how intercultural dialogue has been documented.

The aim of the additional interviews was twofold:

1. To gain further insight into
 - Ways in which the understanding of intercultural dialogue changed during the implementation process
 - Evidence of or reflections on difficulties in achieving intercultural dialogue
2. To solicit reflection on
 - How arts and culture organisations can best engage in intercultural dialogue
 - Challenges and best practice in this field
 - Whether more specific criteria for intercultural dialogue would be welcome in the Programme Guide.

Key findings

(1) A myriad of meanings and a weak delineation from related concepts

The study confirmed that intercultural dialogue has a myriad of meanings.

Respondents evoked dialogue between:

- individuals or organisations from different countries and diverse backgrounds (ethnic, social, professional, artistic etc)
- art disciplines and other professional domains
- men and women, and different generations
- migrants and local populations
- rural and urban populations
- "centres" and "peripheries" of Europe
- the public and the private sectors.

Moreover, the responses showed that actual dialogue between people is not always at the heart of projects or programmes, but that they are deemed to be about intercultural dialogue when they are about cultural diversity. Commonly, projects are concerned with diversity in one of two ways:

- (1) Showcasing diversity: expressing and presenting different cultural identities (national, social, ethnic, community-related, artistic) in order to promote mutual understanding and respect or to embrace a common heritage
- (2) Co-creation out of diversity: exploring and creating something new out of the interaction of people with different backgrounds.

Finally, intercultural dialogue is simply seen as an aspect of trans-national cultural cooperation. An intercultural, i.e. international way of working is widely believed to favour the high quality and success of cultural activities and to stimulate innovation.

(2) Not an equal programme objective: Intercultural Dialogue as an effect of transnational mobility

The EU Culture Programmes currently offers neither guidance on what it intends with the promotion of intercultural dialogue, nor any indication of ways in which projects and work programmes might demonstrate that they will/have promoted intercultural dialogue. As a result, the field is left wide open to the interpretation of programme beneficiaries who claim

to be contributing to it, and the objective of intercultural dialogue does not emerge as a distinctive purpose or a conscious intention, but rather as a by-product of working transnationally, in other words as an effect of the other two objectives of the Programme: Projects and work programmes claim to be about intercultural dialogue by virtue of entailing the mobility of artist/cultural operators or transnational circulation of artistic and cultural works and products. The international collaboration which is the corner stone of projects under the programme is considered intercultural dialogue. "The promotion of intercultural dialogue appears to be accepted as a probable adjunct of cross-border cultural activity" (Ch. Tiller). This actually renders intercultural dialogue superfluous as an objective of the programme. It is just an 'additional box' which gets ticked. "The Culture Programme might be accused of abjuring its responsibility in this context" (Ch. Tiller). Given that "the reality of [the implementation of the objective is] left to applicants' individual reading, there are no winners and no losers." (Ch. Tiller). What this means is that the EU fails to create an effective policy for intercultural dialogue with the programme.

In fact, the 27% percent of projects under the examined period which did not declare that they had intercultural dialogue as an objective, might well have done so. It could be interesting to extend the research to this group and investigate why they did not select intercultural dialogue as an objective – might they have a more discriminate understanding of the term? Might they be considered less opportunistic in not laying claim to a 'fashionable' EU objective?

(3) A better definition: understanding the need but lack of interest

Such diversity of meaning inevitably dilutes the practical value of the term. Many respondents therefore called for a definition of intercultural dialogue under the programme. Beneficiaries put forward that activities of arts and culture organisations should be more interculturally aware and not just involve exchanges for the sake of them or mobility as an end in itself. Some have suggested that international exchanges should stimulate genuine dialogue between many different stakeholders and with a larger public. However, on further probing during the follow-up interviews, all respondents displayed a reluctance to embrace a narrowing down of the term for fear that this might affect the success of applications.

(4) Assumptions only about the achievement of Intercultural Dialogue

Whilst most respondents seem to agree that creating opportunities for direct meetings and interactions around a common topic between people with different cultural backgrounds is the best way of achieving intercultural dialogue, nobody has any measures or firm assessment of having achieved intercultural dialogue. The results of intercultural dialogue activities are largely deemed to become apparent only over longer periods of time. The tangible project or programme results (e.g. a theatre performance, an audio-visual material, the setting up of networks of artists or culture professionals etc) are referred to as evidence of intercultural dialogue by virtue of the participation of people with different cultural backgrounds, but with no regard to quality, depth and sustainability of any dialogue.

Correlation with other research

The study confirms the findings of other recent research on the topic, such as IFACCA's Report "Achieving Intercultural Dialogue through the Arts and Culture? Concepts, Policies, Programmes, Practices". Even if the IFACCA study has a worldwide scope and touches upon intercultural dialogue both within and between countries, it also revealed how broadly intercultural dialogue is understood: That intercultural dialogue is a process nurtured and continuously changed by the interaction between people with different cultural backgrounds; that it is stimulated by artists from different countries while engaging with audiences from across Europe and beyond; that it is a result of initiatives allowing exchange between people with different national traditions etc.

Another study with similar conclusions is the *Diversity Mapping Exercise* carried out by the European Forum for the Arts and Heritage in 2007 amongst the member of the organisation

(now called Culture Action Europe). It also showed that understandings of intercultural dialogue abound, that the concept is widely equated with international cooperation and seen as implicit in contemporary cultural initiatives which entail transnational mobility. EFAH's study also pinpointed the difficulty of evaluating intercultural dialogue: indicators of change in individuals or collectives are scarce and impacts are expected only in the very long term.

Recommendations

The premise of the following recommendations is that intercultural dialogue remains an objective of the EU Culture programme. While excellence in the production and promotion of art and heritage should be a concern of the programme, the EU supports art and heritage primarily for their contribution to the overarching purposes of the economic, social and political well-being of European society. The recognition in this context that the diversity of people in Europe poses a challenge which needs to be addressed across policy areas, has led the EU to make intercultural dialogue a 'transversal' policy aim. The reasons remain strong to continue with this endeavour and also to keep the EU Culture Programme in the service of intercultural dialogue.

However, far from 'instrumentalising' the arts and heritage, a well-defined 'intercultural dialogue' goal will allow those practitioners who already work in this field to find support and those who seek to grow into it, to find a unique developmental opportunity.

(1) Define Intercultural Dialogue explicitly for the purposes of the EU Culture programme

Intercultural dialogue must become a distinctive objective in order to achieve congruity in the aims of the projects under it. According to our Rainbow Paper, intercultural dialogue is "a series of specific encounters, anchored in real space and time between individuals and/or groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, with the aim of exploring, testing and increasing understanding, awareness, empathy, and respect". We also defined that intercultural dialogue has the ultimate purpose "to create a cooperative and willing environment for overcoming political and social tensions".

Given the Culture Programme's focus on artistic and cultural activity, this definition could be adapted to "European exchange and collaboration on arts & heritage to help ensure that people of all backgrounds and identities participate fully and equally in society".

The subject of such exchange and collaboration could be the following principal ways in which the arts & heritage can contribute to intercultural dialogue³:

- Making marginalised groups visible, legitimising their presence and perspectives and improving the social attitudes towards them of dominant majority groups
- Highlighting similarities rather than differences between people by showing historic and current connections between different cultures and human experiences
- Providing a different language where things can be understood by people who do not share a single language and where challenging ideas and experiences can be expressed safely
- Providing safe meeting spaces with the possibility of encounter with other cultures without a commitment to further engagement
- Providing a source of affirmation and confidence building (focusing on people's creativity and achievements, providing enjoyment)
- Breaking down perceived or real barriers between people and removing negative stereotypes

Intercultural issues must not be seen only as those arising between people of different nationality or ethnicity, but must also encompass issues such as class, gender, place, faith and socio-economic realities. Cultural identity must be regarded as an individual as well as a group or national concept.

3. See report on the Platform for Intercultural Europe's 2009 European Forum "The Distinctive Contribution of the Arts to Intercultural Dialogue A View from and on the Arts", <http://www.intercultural-europe.org/template.php?page=pa-european-forum>

The EU Culture Programme should also explicitly support exchange and collaboration on increasing the intercultural competence of cultural organisations to be able to fulfil the above objective. In fact, the programme should become an attractive development option for cultural organisations and should reward experimentation and relationship building.

(2) Withstand resistance to reinforcing the objective on Intercultural Dialogue with a definition

The funding under the programme is precious and it is clear that it is in the interest of current beneficiaries to maintain the status quo with regard to the intercultural dialogue objective rather than create hurdles for eligibility. However, if the programme is to serve wider EU policy and the greater public good, then intercultural dialogue needs to become a more effective objective. By enhancing the intercultural dialogue objective, the programme will increase its potential to affect change and to be seen to do so, thereby being in a position to claim a greater percentage of the overall EU budget and, ultimately, to offer more substantial grants under the programme.

(3) Establish selection criteria

It must be made possible “to identify effective (intercultural) practice and provide direction for evidencing when and how it had happened” (Ch. Tiller). To this end, applicants under the intercultural dialogue objective should be asked questions such as⁴:

“If you have ticked the box intercultural dialogue as an aim, please tell us more about the ways in which intercultural dialogue will take place within your project. e.g.

- Who will the intercultural dialogue take place between? Why do you feel intercultural dialogue is important between these groups? Are all the groups who will be involved in the dialogue present as co-creators in your project? If not, how will you involve them?
- Where will the intercultural activities take place? Will it be in traditional spaces such as theatres and art galleries or in community spaces, found spaces, marketplaces, etc?
- How will you guarantee equal access for the groups you wish to encourage to take part in the dialogue?
- When will intercultural dialogue happen in your project? Is it a theme running through all the activities or will it be highlighted at particular stages?
- What particular project activities will feed into the intercultural dialogue objectives of your project? Why do you expect these activities might effectively encourage intercultural dialogue?
- How will intercultural dialogue be actively encouraged or facilitated? Will it be mostly through the activities or will there be organised forums for inter-cultural dialogue to take place? How will you set up these possibilities?”

(4) Design measures which can prove that Intercultural Dialogue has taken place

A further consequence of the lack of a definition is that no measures can be applied to the achievement of the objective. Whether a project has contributed to intercultural dialogue is currently put down either to the tangible outcomes of a project or is a matter of claiming to have achieved it. Methods need to be proposed which can capture the learning which has taken place in the course of projects. This will be particularly important where a project might have a principal objective – for example, to create a project that addresses climate change – but a strong intercultural element and an intercultural secondary objective. A qualitative approach to evaluation is needed. Based on questions to applicants, such as those suggested above, a methodology for interpreting answers and evaluating follow up statements made in final reports needs to be designed. Peer assessments by clusters of related projects could be made a condition of the programme so as to ensure that learning from projects is maximised.

4. Examples provided by Chrissie Tiller.

(5) Make transnational cooperation that does not necessarily involve mobility eligible under the programme

The programme might additionally promote virtual “trans-national exchange of effective models of good practice [of promoting intercultural dialogue that happens within partner countries]” (Ch. Tiller). Although the quality of interchange that takes place in live communication can often be more powerful and effective than virtual discourse it should be possible for the Culture Programme to provide national projects that promote dialogue within countries, between say “first and third generations of immigrant communities, the dominant aesthetic and working class cultures, between 21st century ‘hybrid’ identity and historical ethnicity” (Ch. Tiller) to apply for an added element of trans-national exchange.

(6) Fund preparatory actions

At the same time the programme might also consider supporting the partner search as part of the development of real intercultural dialogue. In the Culture Programme as in many other programmes (“the real work is finding the partners”), money for preparatory actions (Grundtvig model) should be made available.

(7) Ensure coherence between the achievements of Intercultural Dialogue under the EU Culture Programme with those under the other EU Programmes and actions with this objective.

To this end, studies similar to this one should be conducted on intercultural dialogue as an objective in the Youth, Citizenship, Multilingualism, Life-long Learning, and Media Programmes as well as relevant instruments of research, social, regional, neighbourhood and integration policies.

Concluding Remarks

In order to make the EU Culture Programme more effective in terms of intercultural dialogue, reflection on the nature of ‘objectives’ might be useful: The Culture Programme might need to be clearer that ‘funding programme objectives’ do not need to be the same as ‘project objectives’ or ‘organisational work programme objectives’. It could be made clear that the EU wishes to promote mobility or intercultural dialogue as working tools because of the many benefits they bring to projects, organisations and societies at large, rather than prescribing mobility or intercultural dialogue as a subject matter.

Intercultural dialogue could be promoted as a methodology that ensures that all aspects of the inclusion of ‘the other’ are thought about in any given project ‘from planning to implementation, and that new perspectives on how to perform, how to create, how to entertain and inspire may emerge as a result. Ultimately, the EU would be promoting intercultural dialogue as a democratic process for all members of our diverse societies.

This approach could also begin to resolve the problem of measuring long-term impact. Once guidelines on possible methodologies for encouraging intercultural dialogue are set out, it will also be possible to evaluate whether these methodologies have been employed successfully or not.



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