

Report on the Malmö Practice Exchange

15-16 June 2009, Spiritus Mundi, Malmö, Sweden

in partnership with The Nordic Forum for Interculture and Spiritus Mundi

Intercultural Capacity-Building within Cultural Organisations



**PLATFORM FOR
INTERCULTURAL EUROPE**



 **european cultural foundation**



Culture Programme

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The European Forum
for the Arts and Heritage

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1 Introduction and context

1.1 The European Intercultural Forum, June 2009

On 15 and 16 June 2009, the Platform for Intercultural Europe¹ held its first Practice Exchange and Roundtable as an independent civil society organisation. The event was developed in partnership with the Nordic Forum for Interculture² and kindly hosted by Spiritus Mundi³ at its centre in Malmö (Sweden). It was designed as an informal and open discussion with an invited group of 30 experienced and qualified representatives from the cultural and civil society sectors in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Representatives of the Platform from other parts of Europe also attended; two independent experts acted as facilitators and commentators.

The Practice Exchange built on a series of meetings and discussions held over the past three years by the Nordic Forum for Interculture, as well as on the continuing work of the Platform for Intercultural Europe. Recognising both the opportunity presented by the Brussels Culture Forum⁴ in September 2009 and the position of the Platform as a recognised interlocutor of the European Commission, the event aimed to identify realistic policy goals that could be recommended to EU and national agencies. Within this general aim, its objectives were to:

- Explore the intercultural efforts of participating organisations as institutions and in their operations in Scandinavia;
- Pay attention in particular to intercultural issues concerning staff compositions and recruitment, governance structures and policy and strategy implementation, intellectual resources and gaining new competences in organisations;
- Present, explore and map experiences, projects and opportunities;
- Reflect on the successes and failures of Nordic strategies in a European context;
- Identify and distil ideas with which to inform the debate on the 'good governance of diversity' at the European Union Culture Forum in September 2009.

The first day was structured around case studies presented for discussion by the participants; these are summarised in section 2 below. In each case the presenter was asked to address the following questions:

- What was the problem and its negative effects on the organisation?
- What action was taken to address it?
- What were the results (expected and unexpected, positive and negative)?

The second day used these experiences as the basis for considering what action could be taken by cultural organisations and what policy provisions might be made at national level to support their engagement in and commitment to intercultural dialogue.

1.2 The report on the Practice Exchange's discussions

This report summarises the key issues that emerged during the Practice Exchange, though inclusion here does not imply that everyone present agreed with any specific point. It does not set out all the interventions made – detailed meeting notes were made for the record – aiming instead to give an overview of the experiences presented and the wider issues raised in the discussion.

The report also sets out some preliminary suggestions for future action in Section 3 below. These will be the basis of further work, for refinement and debate.

Through this iterative and open process, the Platform aims to promote understanding of and support for intercultural dialogue and to develop policy proposals and practice guidance. Intercultural dialogue is a vital and complex issue: this document is another step in its continuing development in European society.

1 <http://www.intercultural-europe.org>

2 The Nordic Forum for Interculture was launched by Intercult based in Sweden, the Copenhagen International Theatre, and Du Store Verden in Norway. Its purpose is to take a pan-Nordic perspective on the challenges of embracing cultural diversity and working interculturally in the cultural sector and of identifying the most pressing problems and obstacles that are in the way of better culture policy in the Nordic region. NFI has held major meetings in each of the three countries and is supported by the arts councils and cultural ministries of all three countries, as well as Culture Point Nord. <http://www.intercult.se/Content/Eng/Ourwork/NordicForumforInterculture.aspx>

3 <http://www.spiritusmundi.nu/>

4 http://ec.europa.eu/culture/news/news2307_en.htm

2 Case Studies

2.1 Introduction

This section of the report describes the experiences presented to the Practice Exchange by different Scandinavian organisations. The descriptions are necessarily brief, but further information about each initiative can be obtained through the organisations mentioned. The discussions prompted by the case studies are summarised in the following section, together with some proposals for action.

2.2 Diversifying the boards of cultural organisations

'The informal appointments of boards make it difficult to influence them.'

In Norway, Du store verden (DSV) developed a programme called Styrende Mangfold to support the appointment of people with non-Norwegian backgrounds to the boards of cultural institutions. There is currently little representation of this section of society in the governance of Norwegian cultural organisations: a survey of 80 institutions identified only three people with this multinational experience. Inspired by the Dutch Atana5 programme, DSV recruited a group of about 20 people to take part in a familiarisation programme intended to enable them to take up board positions. With equal numbers of men and women, the group has a very wide range of backgrounds and is aged between 28 and 58.

The Styrende Mangfold programme includes lectures and presentations, visits to cultural institutions, networking meetings and similar events. There have been opportunities to meet with the directors of cultural institutions, staff and political leadership at the Ministry of Culture and other cultural professionals. From this it emerged that the Ministry of Culture currently had no policies on this issue; as a result of the programme, this is being reviewed. Further events are now planned together with more recruitment to bring new people into the programme.

Further information

- Du store verden! Kongensgt. 2, 0153 OSLO, Norway
- <http://www.du-store-verden.no/> and <http://www.styrendemangfold.no>

2.3 Engaging a national institution in intercultural dialogue

'People don't ignore the museum because they don't know about us, but because we don't give them content that interests them.'

Copenhagen City Museum has developed its programme of cultural inclusion on the basis of Danish legislation that requires public institutions to make culture available to all. Since this is a cornerstone of democracy and set out in law and national policy, there can be no objection to the Museum's work in this field. The challenge has been to open a naturally conservative institution to meet and serve the needs of a complex and diverse society.

The Museum aims to do outreach in a profound sense – to take the museum's work and resources out to where people live. The construction of a new metro line has necessitated new archaeological excavations in neighbourhoods and provided an opportunity to engage people in the communities where they live. With funding from heritage and social sources, the Museum has been able to recruit a team of 10 people to undertake this outreach work in Nørrebro and to open up people's own histories in ways that matter to them.

In doing this, it was essential to recognise that historical culture was not a priority for many of the people that the Museum set out to engage. They had other employment and social concerns and different cultural values: the Museum could not expect them to come onto its ground but had to meet them in their own space. The whole process has been long, slow and challenging: it also had to confront xenophobia and nationalism, but it has been very rewarding.

Among many lessons from this work, the issue of critical mass has been important. Being able to appoint enough people from minority communities has ensured that they have mutual support and a stronger voice within the institution; as a result, they are not marginalised within the Museum's workforce. At the same time, the Museum had to avoid the trap of making these new staff representative: they could not be made to stand in for entire communities or diverse groups.

Further information

- The Museum of Copenhagen 59 Vesterbrogade DK-1620 Copenhagen, Denmark
- <http://www.bymuseum.dk/index.php>

5 http://www.binoq.nl/atana/english_version.aspx

2.4 Reconnecting a theatre to its community

'We cannot go on making theatre in the old way: we have to change the accessibility.'

The Taastrup Theatre in Copenhagen is in a neighbourhood in which there are 49 different minority groups. Recognising the need to find new and appropriate ways of serving this community's cultural interests, the theatre has embarked on a radical reinvention of itself, starting with the building itself. This was rebuilt in a more open and transparent form to let people see what is done inside. At the same time, every aspect of the theatre's work is being rethought: governance, staff roles, programme, branding and marketing – nothing is left out.

The repertoire was transformed within a year to become increasingly intercultural both in terms of performers and subjects explored. Taastrup is now trying to secure academic support for this process of reflection and to develop better approaches to evaluating the impact of their work.

At the heart of the theatre's approach is to recognise that the artistic process is much more than what happens on stage. The team has begun to reimagine the theatre's relationship with its audience to involve dialogue before and after each production. Working with people before they enter the theatre and after they leave demands new ideas and new approaches. The theatre has set up an ambassador group to open dialogue with different groups in the area, so as to develop a common understanding of what the theatre can offer the local community.

The strategy has divided people. Some staff members are excited by the new ideas and are keen to discover new ways of making theatre. Others reject this approach and many people have left the theatre. In response, Taastrup is actively recruiting in the neighbourhood, aiming to motivate people to apply for a job with the theatre because they share its vision and want to be part of it. There has been an ambivalent response from some politicians who agree privately with the approach but are wary of the controversy. But, if the strategy has involved risk, it has produced new energy, new ideas and new audience engagement. The theatre believes that not changing would have been much riskier in the longer term.

Further information

- Taastrup Teater, Kjeld Abells Plads - 2630 Taastrup, Denmark
- <http://www.taastrupteater.dk/opslag.asp?side=42>

2.5 Creating multiple use spaces for cultural interaction

'It became clear that it should not be a migrant cultural centre but a centre where different communities can meet.'

Union Scene in Drammen is a new cultural space rather than an existing one adapting itself to a new situation. Freedom from tradition or convention and from existing structures and ways of doing things has been important in the development of a space dedicated to intercultural exchange. Political commitment by the City Council has also been key to Union Scene's development as a meeting space for the city rather than a venue for migrants or minorities.

A redundant factory was converted to house a range of cultural facilities including a theatre, music spaces, studios and other facilities. Retaining flexible spaces for hire has made it possible to attract many groups who have used the building for their own social and cultural events; as a result they have developed a sense of familiarity that encourages them to come back.

The focus of Union Scene has been firmly on young people, who are seen as critical to the future of a city that was in decline but is now growing fast. There has been a strong programme of work with schools and a commitment to education in the arts as a means of supporting economic and social inclusion. Working with facilitators and people in the community has been important in extending people's knowledge of and willingness to come to the venue.

Further information

- Union Scene, Grønland 60, 3045 Drammen, Norway
- <http://www.unionscene.no/>
- <http://www.taastrupteater.dk/opslag.asp?side=42>

3 Debates and proposals

3.1 Cultural diversity within cultural organisations

The participants of the Practice Exchange were impressed by some of the reported initiatives to open cultural institutions to the diversity of their societies. They saw the inclusion of people from non-European backgrounds as board members, staff and freelance artists as essential to the cultural sector's ability to serve the whole of society and to promote intercultural dialogue actively. Unless cultural organisations are themselves examples of good practice, they have limited credibility in arguing for intercultural dialogue. Unless they embody interculturalism, they will not have the knowledge to engage in dialogue creatively.

'When I was employed, I had the impression that I was only chosen because I was representing the black society. I used to be so grateful before, but then I realized that they need me.'

At the same time, the danger of tokenism was recognised. Appointing one or two people to a board would not have any impact unless the board itself was willing to change existing ways of thinking and working. There is a risk of such changes being made only in response to external pressure so as to give the appearance of change when none is actually intended. Similarly, appointing staff from non-European cultures implied a readiness on the part of cultural organisations to learn and to change that needed to be followed through.

Participants stressed the risks to which new staff and board members could be exposed if the organisations they joined were not committed to development. They might be isolated and eventually disempowered in a situation where their knowledge and experience was not valued and where their contribution was not enabled. The meeting was challenged to consider whether any Scandinavian cultural institution would have a black leader within the next ten years.

Suggested action in this area included:

- Opening up board membership through formal advertising to recruit members;
- Support programmes to interest people from non-European backgrounds in the work of cultural boards;
- Professionalising board membership with job descriptions and training etc.;
- Requiring publicly funded cultural organisations to develop, publish and monitor cultural diversity action plans covering staff, governance and programmes;
- Establishing a long-term commitment that the governing bodies and staff of publicly funded, cultural institutions and organisations should reflect the demographic make up of their society.

3.2 Engaging new audiences in intercultural dialogue

Participants' views varied about how much progress had been made towards an inclusive cultural sector in recent years. For some, things had changed substantially, while for others, cultural institutions remained conservative, unsure how or even whether to respond to the changing interests of the societies they serve.

Many participants thought a stronger commitment to intercultural dialogue was needed from cultural organisations and that meant examining programmes and repertoire creatively, accepting that renewal could be a very rewarding process.

It was suggested that cultural organisations are still thinking too much about their own interests and making assumptions about what audiences want or should want. It was widely assumed, for example, that people did not attend because of various economic or social barriers: but the truth might be that, knowing what is offered by cultural institutions, they simply reject it as being of no interest or value to them. Cultural organisations need to avoid the trap of problematising others in order to offer their solutions in response. It may be more accurate to suggest that it is the cultural institutions that have problems of resources, audiences and ultimately legitimacy.

'Identity is not only where we come from but also where we want to go: look forwards, rather than backwards.'

The changing demographics and cultural heritage of European communities, along with other changes in cultural production, technology and values, have also created a very different social and economic context for culture than that which existed when most cultural institutions were formed. Similarly the cultural support mechanisms, often established in the context of the post-war welfare state, do not always reflect the ways in which culture is created and distributed nor the people involved.

Suggested action in this area included:

- New strategies in building relationships with audiences and non-attenders;
- Using personal marketing methods, traditional social networks and spaces; the Internet is important but still engages only a part of society;
- Accepting and learning from the inevitable failures of experimental processes;
- Recognising the need for many approaches to develop diverse solutions for complex situations.

3.3 Increasing the visibility of marginalised groups

One of the functions of culture is to enable marginalised or otherwise invisible groups to represent themselves within the space of a democratic society. Intercultural dialogue can give minorities visibility and enable them to engage with others – who may not share their values or ideas – on a more equal basis. From this perspective, the issue could be seen as being about democracy rather than diversity.

The challenge is therefore to ensure that all citizens can take up the right to participate in the cultural life of the community set out in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁶: intercultural dialogue is about fulfilling the democratic obligations European nations agreed to decades ago.

Recognising the platforms controlled by cultural institutions, and their power as agents of legitimatisation, participants gave considerable attention to how they could support this process in their work. Encouraging more cross-sectoral working could be valuable in this context, to help cultural organisations engage with other public responsibilities such as education or social work. There should also be specific help to develop concepts at an early stage, so that less experienced and confident groups could gain support.

'There is no right way to do it: there are different ways.'

But it was also noted that, although many artists are happier operating independently of state funding, other forms of support – such as training and venues – might be fundamental to their work. At the same time, their work does not always fit neatly into the existing art form structures prevalent in most European cultural countries. This could be true both of young artists pushing the boundaries of form through new technology and of artists from non-European backgrounds whose forms of expression did not always fit into European artistic concepts.

Suggested action in this area included:

- The establishment of a new 'arms' length' public fund for cultural activities not currently supported through existing funding routes, to give minority groups better access to resources;
- New cross-sectoral partnerships linking culture, international relations, education, social work and economic development to ensure the integration of more diverse cultural expression into the mainstream of public life;
- The promotion of interdisciplinary cultural spaces with a mission to support intercultural exchange at a city level.

6 <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a27>

4 Conclusions and next steps

The Malmö Practice Exchange and Round Table

The Malmö Practice event proved to be a rich and thoughtful encounter between cultural sector actors committed to intercultural dialogue in Scandinavia. The discussion was fruitful for several reasons that should be kept in mind when preparing future meetings on this model; they include:

- A clear focus for discussion within the broad frame of intercultural dialogue;
- Establishing an atmosphere of confidence in which people could speak openly;
- A degree of shared values and concepts among committed participants;
- Well-prepared presentations of interesting case studies;
- A focus on practical and transferable lessons from experiences;
- A commitment to developing concrete proposals for action;
- A good environment for discussion and excellent logistical support.

As the Platform takes forward the issues opened up in the Malmö event, it will also need to consider these and other practical lessons from the event in order that its own work should represent best practice in intercultural dialogue.

5 Appendix

The Platform for Intercultural Europe

The Platform for Intercultural Europe developed as a civil society response to the European Union's Year of Intercultural Dialogue in 2008. It was launched with the support of the European Culture Foundation and Culture Action Europe and brought together actors in the fields of culture, education, youth and social work, minority rights, and anti-discrimination and human rights. During 2008, the Platform organised a number of meetings and conferences that led to the publication of a Rainbow Paper (a policy paper dealing with cultural diversity). This document was published in September 2008 under the title Intercultural Dialogue: From Practice to Policy and Back. By June 2009, the Rainbow Paper had been endorsed by 334 organisations in Europe as the basis for future policy and strategy.

The Platform began as a campaign and has now become an established civil society association linking a wide range of European, national and local organisations committed to promoting intercultural dialogue. It is also recognised by the European Commission as a formal interlocutor in this area, within the framework of the 'Structured Dialogue' between the EU and civil society. Consequently, the Platform now receives some financial support from the Commission and is consulted on policy in its area of competence.

Further information on the Platform for Intercultural Europe is available here:

<http://www.intercultural-europe.org/template.php?page=about-the-platform>

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