



IETM REPORT

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TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE

Report from the IETM Amsterdam Plenary Meeting, 14 - 17 April 2016

by Wu Lei



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Introduction

The session advocates strongly the continued efforts in deepening the intercultural dialogue as an effective cultural strategy and promotes the exemplary instrument of the Cultural Diversity Code developed by the Dutch cultural sector.

Inclusive culture rejects the old debate of cultural diversity solely based on ethnicity, and appeals instead to a thorough examination on sociocultural diversity from the heterogeneous parameters as class, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, etc. Only when this comprehensive cultural diversity is well echoed on the festival, cultural organisation, theatre company, and individual artist levels, can cultural diversity fulfil its inclusive ambition.



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Moderators:

Geoliane Arab - Jens Bjerregaard / Aurora Borealis / Moussem, Denmark / Belgium

Sophie Travers - Australia Council for the Arts, Australia / Germany

With:

Mavis Carrilho - consultant/project manager Cultural Diversity Code, the Netherlands

Noraly Beyer - Ambassador of the Cultural Diversity Code, the Netherlands

Julie Ward - [Member of the European Parliament](#), Belgium/United Kingdom

Intercultural dialogue

Julie Ward MEP, author of “Role of intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity and education in promoting EU fundamental values” (aka “[Ward’s Report](#)”) adopted in January 2016 by the European Parliament, presents this paper to the working session.

In the cultural discourse and practice today, the necessity of (re-)framing intercultural dialogue as a subject is greatly felt. Intercultural dialogue has often been misunderstood in its **nominal** sense as “as language classes, youth exchange or inviting a dance company to school to teach students as Hindi dances”. However, intercultural dialogue is not just painting the students’ faces as Hindi. According to Julie, “**intercultural dialogue is an on-going process, and it requires certain mind-set open to otherness and engaging with others.**”



The Tribe - Urban Theatre Projects
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Cultural Diversity Code

In early 2010, the Cultural Diversity Code Steering Group, made up of representatives of three sector organizations (NAPK - Nederlandse Associatie Voor Podiumkunsten, NMV - Museumvereniging and VSCD - Vereniging van Schouwburg- en Concertgebouwdirecties) and four cultural institutes (Erfgoed Nederland, Kunstfactor, [TIN](#) (Theater in Nederland) and MCN) took up the challenge issued by the (then) Minister of Education, Culture and Science, Mr Ronald Plasterk, who had asked the sector to develop a Cultural Diversity Code.

Mavis Carrilho, independent executive consultant in the Netherlands, and Noraly Beyer, responsible for the development of the code, present the [Cultural Diversity Code \(English version\)](#). The Code is a practical instrument which has been developed to assist the governing bodies and staff of cultural institutions which receive public funding. The Code offers both a general framework and concrete guidelines which

will allow cultural diversity to be firmly embedded within the organization. The purpose of a Diversity Code produced by the sector itself can help to ensure that organizations **not only talk about diversity but actually work to achieve it in practice.**

Mavis and her colleague use the term “the elephant in the room” to refer to the cultural diversity in the society: everyone watches it, but nobody dares to touch it.

However, the issue behind Cultural Diversity Codes is about the implementation of equal opportunity and accountability of action. Julieanne Campbell, general manager of the socially engaged [Urban Theater Projects](#) in Australia, points that the realization of cultural diversity is about **giving up power to make real change as moral obligation**, but the problem requires concrete actions and takes years to be solved.

Afshan D’souza-Lodhi, freelance artist

and playwright from the UK, believes that art has a general issue with inclusivity. Nike Jonah, director of arts consultancy Connecting Dots in the UK, regrets about the reality that prevalent understanding of cultural diversity is “unfortunately about race”. “**Cultural diversity is about everything: class, gender equality, age, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, media competence and it is about social inclusion.**” And what cultural diversity is also about “**intersectionality**” (Geoliane Arab).

Nova Bhattacharya, founder and artistic director of [Nova Dance](#) in Canada, advocates the “need to embrace the elephant” and believes that we have the responsibility and power to change, not just to discuss. As a dancer and choreographer who is engaged in the interweaving between the classical Bharatanatyam and contemporary dance through evocative new works, Nova encourages IETM and cultural organisations alike to **look at artists for inspiration**. Once you are watching the work binaries disappear. In artistic collaboration, the elephant in the room is hiding from us.

The solo theatre piece [Schijn](#) shown at Het Compagnietheater as a warming up to the session is based on the actor Fahd Larhzaoui’s true story as second-generation Moroccan Muslim gay living in the Netherlands. The piece opens up the multi-layered closets of migration, religion and sexual orientation in the structure of Bildungsroman, and has been characterised as “fantastic”, “funny”, “emotional” and “accessible” by most of the IETM participants. Jarrod Francisco, director of Likeminds and producer of the play, spoke about the difficulties they have encountered in the programming, distribution and audience development of this potentially controversial theatre piece: at the beginning no theatre was willing to program the piece. When they finally found a theatre that was willing to show it for a very short period, they abstained from using the popular online advertisement but chose to use more secure paper advertisement to avoid protest and censorship. To test the reaction from the Muslim community, they even invited an Imam to watch the piece. He turned out to have no objection. These challenges triggered the reaction from the IETM participants as follows:

- The **role of the programmer** in facing the problem of inclusive culture and cultural diversity in the art and cultural fields has been raised by Geoliane Arab, co-director of [Spring Festival in Beirut](#) and development manager of [Beirut and Beyond International Music Festival](#). Festival programmers tend to invite the already famous (often white) artists and groups to facilitate the marketing and ensure the audience, but by doing so they are colonising the art field. A decolonizing initiative [Décoloniser les arts](#) was shared by Albane Guinet-Ahrens from France. According to her, diversity is about difference and collaboration of different social sectors. Diversity is to look at the empowering of the underprivileged for social coherence. Pippa Bailey, senior producer of [Performing Lines](#) in Australia, echoes the notion of colonialism in culture and theatre. Recalling the colonial history of the white people coming to the land of Australia, she thinks that the same structure of colonialism is being unwillingly re-enacted in culture and theatre. The tokenism of cultural exchange and diversity needs to be examined. For the training of young cultural personnel, Ricardo Peach, director of [Vrystaat Kunstefees](#) in South Africa, shares their experience in framing diversity in the fringe festival, literature festival as well as in their programme innovation. He points out that a mutual long-term exchange of **mentorship and internships** and collaboration on an equal basis between the festivals in South Africa and Europe could be a good solution to train local cultural professionals.
- **Audience development** indeed plays an important role in creating an inclusive culture, and at the same time can provoke special sensitivities. Dawn Walton, artistic director of [Eclipse Theater Company](#) in the

UK, uses her experience with black theatre as an example to indicate that programmers unfortunately often underestimate the perception of the audience. What her theatre would do to attract audience is to go to meet and talk with the people in the city, get them in and turn them into cultural ambassadors. According to their experience of audience development, 25-30% of the audience are new comers, and 60% more likely to follow another show. **“Actually diversity is about bridging and reaching out to the audience”**.

- Cultural diversity is not only about collaboration between artists from different cultures or putting audiences from different cultural backgrounds together in theatre; it is more complex and is related to **audience’s reception** too. Audience’s appetite to appreciate the amazing works can never be underestimated. Alice Nash, executive producer of [Back to Back Theatre](#) in Australia, relates how their theater works performed by people with mental disabilities are greatly appreciated by the audience as “creating new aesthetics”.

- Melba LeRose, playwright-director-actor and artistic/administrative director of the non-profit and multicultural theatre company [NY Artists Unlimited](#), talks about the difference between the performing arts in the US and in Europe. Europe always has government support, but it is not always the case in the US. According to her experience in New York, theatres are always devoted to multiculturalism, inclusiveness and topics on “border” issues if only for economical reasons, and “have been way more inclusive”. There are also a lot of Spanish and Asian theatre companies in the US, as there is a need for them.

Feedback to IETM

And how about IETM itself as a European network to get more diverse and more inclusive?

“Does IETM look like the world we are in?” the session moderators ask the audience. Some participants think IETM is not representative of the actual cultural diversity in the world and strongly advise IETM to work on a change; others acknowledge that IETM is international and by that intercultural. Besides, it respects gender equality, both in terms of management and participation. Regarding the representation of the arts field people working in management and those producing could be better balanced, but the visibility of freelance professionals in IETM is satisfying. But it is clear that cultural diversity in the sense of representing different realities in the network is limited.

IETM functions as a **platform** for the international meeting, but is also a great opportunity for the national performing arts delegates to meet. In respect to the case of diversity, free membership offers or travel bursaries can work together with the national funding support and greatly encourages the diverse participation.

Diversity is making people feel welcome to take part in a dialogue. Discussions should be more accessible for different groups of people, regardless their cultural background, physical abilities, geographical location (video-streaming), etc.

Diversity is about the language. English should not be considered as the only working language of meetings. The general English-speaking environment makes the English speaker appear eloquent and makes non-English speaker feel marginalized in the conversation. English-speakers should use a simpler and more generally-used vocabulary. Participants should feel free to use other languages, while interpretation should be provided (as a form of partnership between IETM and meeting participants). To avoid misunderstanding and facilitate communication, IETM should issue a publication with key sector-specific terms translated into different languages.

Diversity is not to be talked in the “diversity room”, but in all contexts from creation to distribution, individual to policy level. IETM can programme the activities like meeting the artists of the performances or visiting their rehearsals for direct exchange. During discussions, IETM should provide the exchange between participants and local artists.

Diversity is not the purpose, but the means. IETM has taken the participants’ request and works on the development of a strategy to further incite the diversification of the network – an effort that will imply the support needed to create a more inclusive sector.