

Thematic priorities, altered institutional typology. Cultural policies and institutions facing the challenge of multicultural societies

by *Dragan Klaic* *

Traditional perceptions of the Netherlands in Europe are associated with the notion of *tolerance*. Until very recently, many Dutch were also prone to boast of their presumed tolerance. After the second politically inspired murder in less than two years and revengeful fires and explosives set under mosques, churches and Islamic schools in the last few weeks, this flattering reputation has become quite dubious. The embarrassing story behind those painful events is that in the Netherlands multiculturalism has become a dirty word that nowadays is invoked to mark the cowardice and opportunism of policy makers, and a failure of integration efforts directed at Turkish and esp. Moroccan migrant workers and their offspring. Statistics and research indicate the opposite: a continuous integration and socio-economic advancement of those migrants, and especially in the second and third generation, coupled with cultural confluence and adaptation; but arrogant pundits and politicians have their own versions of truth and they have assigned to multiculturalism a negative notion, now dominant in the public discourse, coupled with offensive, provoking and humiliating generalization about fellow citizens of foreign origin and especially Muslims. Marketing of fear and mistrust regularly pays off, peddlers of anxiety find their clientele easily. Dutch self-perpetuated myth of tolerance has been dispelled by the Dutch themselves.

Multiple challenges

In the Netherlands as elsewhere in Europe, the consequences of migration are testing the notion of national identity and assumed homogeneity of the society while the European

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integration process undermines the notion of the national state and appropriates some of its core competences. At the same time, globalization causes anxieties about the traditional advantages and future success of every national economy and the explosive growth of the cultural industry causes anxieties about uniformization and ‘macdonalization’ of the national culture, esp. in its traditional prestige sectors and key institutions.

In addition, the thinking of cultural policy makers in Europe is affected by the protracted slow down of the economy, mass unemployment and job flight to the East while the graying of the population raises fears about the sustainability of social care standards. The ongoing shrinking of the *welfare state*, with gradual reduction of the health, educational and social care provisions, imposes a debate on the legitimacy and urgency of culture expenditure - even though per capita spending on culture in the EU remains very modest. In fact, the average is much lower since the EU enlargement because some new member states spend only euro 15 p/y (if capital investment in cultural infrastructure is discounted) per inhabitant and very few member states spend more than euro 100.

Cultural debates – if not cultural policies – are affected and colored by the raised fears of the asylum seekers, radical Islam and terrorist attacks. Against such background, it would perhaps make more sense to look at the culture budgets not in terms of their economic impact – as has been the case for the last 10-15 years, under the influence of the neo-liberal thinking - but rather as a *security_issue*. An argument could be made that discrimination, exclusion and marginalization in a political, ideological and socio-economic sense nourish a dangerous cultural insecurity; and that cultural policies aimed at inclusion and active participation of marginalized social groups in culture nurture their sense of cultural security, a sense of belonging, and strengthen the social cohesion. This security prism has consequences on developing cultural policies at home and in the EU at large but also in developing a cultural dimension of an emerging EU foreign and security policy, esp. in the

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direction of immediate neighbors in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Southern Mediterranean.

Fashionable buzz words

These broader geo-strategic considerations usually lead to benevolent arguments for the defense of the cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, as advocated since 9/11 by both Council of Europe and European Commission. The notion of *cultural diversity* is applied in the European context for various purposes and interests: to deal with the cultural consequences of the economic globalization; to safeguard the regime of national governments' and EU subsidies to the national media and audiovisual industry against WTO pressures and prohibitions; to construct a vague notion of European culture as a common good of all citizens of Europe or at least EU under the trite motto 'unity in diversity'; to pay lip service to the diversity of cultural realms, preferences, traditions, life styles and cultural expressions noticeable in every city and country, without any real commitment or obligation accrued; to make sure cultural goods and services are exempted from some future WTO negotiations - as in the current UNESCO effort to draft a Convention for the protection and development of the cultural diversity.

Similarly, the notion of *intercultural dialogue* is being increasingly used to pacify inter-religious tensions and dispel the obsessive hostile images and generalizations. Such a dialogue is presented as a confidence building measure, as a communication effort aiming to prevent conflict and violence, diffuse stereotypes, make participants learn more about each other and reach more mutual appreciation and respect. However, the presumption here is that cultures enter a dialogue. That is hardly possible. Cultures are in enmeshment, competition, conflict and mutual influence. They overlap and challenge and test each other in an enormous variety of players, gestures, expressions, works and contexts. A dialogue is conducted by individuals and they shouldn't be seen as representatives of cultures because

no one can claim a representational authority of such immense proportions. To label a dialogue of individuals as an intercultural dialogue leads to monopolistic insinuations and a homogenizing discourse and precludes possibilities of nuanced personal stances within complex cultural fields, with a plurality of views, including radical, minority and unpopular views that nevertheless belong to a certain cultural realm or tradition.

Cultural policies, as we saw them develop in the last 50-60 years as part of *public policy*, are a specific European phenomenon that brought conscious commitment of public resources to well-defined objectives, complex distribution mechanisms but caused some negative consequences as well: culture has become a rather isolated sector and sectorial approach marks the division of cultural budgets to steady fields such as heritage, arts, libraries etc. and even of specific artistic disciplines ...visual arts, performing arts, music, film... Cultural policies have evolved in Europe from early post-war notions of democratization of culture to cultural democracy, with some attention to the cultural rights of minorities, standardized in the Council of Europe norms, but with a delayed understanding of policy implications of the rapidly emerging multicultural cities, transformed by migratory gulfs. For too long everything concerning migrants and *Gastarbeiters* was automatically assigned to social policy, away from culture.

Institutional bias, institutional fatigue

Traditionally, cultural policies favor institutions, make them grow, take them for granted, fund them regardless of the quantity and quality of their output and real impact. They receive such a favorable treatment just because they are around, have a long record as a subsidy recipient, at the expense of new and small initiatives, not yet institutionalized actions and projects, that are expected to prove themselves with no or just minimal grants before they can expect to break in the inner sanctum of subsidy distribution.

Moreover, cultural institutions haven't been set up during the last 200 years or longer in Europe with a goal to enhance cultural diversity nor in order to engage in intercultural

dialogue. Those institutions have been traditionally instrumentalized by the ideology of *nation*, national state and national culture, and expected to serve to it. Recently, cultural institutions have been forced to search for new masters: regional and municipal governments with their growing prerogatives and budgets, corporate sponsors, private foundations, and to rely on various fashionable panacea such as cultural tourism.

Institutional culture is getting increasingly nervous because of the growing competition of the cultural industry and its impact on mass consumer patterns that cannot any longer be offset by simple invocation of tradition, prestige and artistic excellence. In most European countries (and a bit less so in the UK) cultural institutions have been slow to take into account demographic changes caused by migration. Calls to address those issues were greeted in many parts with lip service only, in a belief that this is just a passing hobbyhorse of politicians who will be out of office anyhow by the next elections (as in the Netherlands, with its second ‘purple’ cabinet and its equally colorful State Secretary for Culture van de Ploeg, 1998-2002). Furthermore, traditional cultural institutions in many countries frequently underestimated the impact of the ICT revolution on the dissemination of information and communication with the audience, omitting to grasp that this communication contains not just information *about* the cultural product but constitutes *the* cultural product itself.

The prevailing *institutional fatigue* in culture is less surprising if one thinks that a great deal of cultural production and distribution relies on a limited range of institutional models, many of which are 200 years old and only a few developed after 1968. The challenge today is not only to modernize and revive those traditional models but to invent new ones and test them for their capacity to function parallel and in relationship with the prevailing cultural industry, to communicate digitally with distance audiences and contribute to the enhancing of *intercultural competence* as their strategic success factors.

Enhancing intercultural competence

Intercultural competence presumes respect for the others, openness and curiosity for the others; and an eagerness to engage in collaborative relations with the others with expectation of mutual enriching. Intercultural competence could be enhanced locally and in international engagement, it is a conceptual link the local and international activities and one can hardly expect to work effectively with partners abroad if one can't work with immediate neighbors, in the same city. On an individual level, intercultural competence could be seen as a skill, attitude mentality, to be developed locally, by immersion and training, and then through exercise of mobility. On the institutional level, intercultural competence needs to be developed as a strategic orientation, an internal policy, to be absorbed by the internal culture of the institution, understood, shared, endorsed and promulgated by the entire staff, from the board, leadership and top management to the temporary and part time employees, interns and associated artists. Only then it will appear visible in the programming and ultimately encompass the audience. Practically, it means making the intercultural competence development part of the overall *institutional development*, with annual reviews, trainings and upgrades, in relation to the institution itself, its inner organization and staff, its immediate territorial context and in view of its broader national and international activities.

London LIFT festival, for instance, started in 1981 as an international program to combat the self-centeredness of the English stage at the time, then it recognized the multicultural dimension of London and set to explore it – while remaining an international festival - in its programming, choice of locations, outreach and educational programs and partnership with the local civic groups. Ultimately, LIFT built a following in such not-so-obvious places like Brixton but also achieved a mental re-mapping of London among the theater regulars, brought to places of the city they originally considered a no-go zone.

On a policy making level, *thematic approach* to cultural planning, one that sets common goals, is still a rarity even though it offers opportunities to exit from the habitual framework

of sectorial subsidy distribution and stimulate institutional innovation. By setting governance standards, programming parameters and audience expectations, the subsidy giver might be able to commit subsidized institutions to engage themselves in the enhancement of intercultural competence – their own, of the associated artists and other partners and ultimately of the audience.

I notice that in the mental health service in the Netherlands conscious efforts are being made to boost the intercultural competence of the professionals, by defining the *intercultural profiles* of the psychologists, psychiatrists and mental health nurses in terms of their desired awareness of own cultural background, awareness of the other cultural backgrounds among the clients, and ability to intervene in recognition of the specific cultural background of the client. This intercultural competence profiling is linked to the chief tasks for each profile and systematically developed and evaluated in the whole system of institutions. Could this be a strategy applicable in the cultural sector, with its much wider range of professions engaged and a broader range of divergent institutions?

An effort to achieve more cultural diversity in the entire cultural field was made in the Netherlands with the establishment of the Phoenix Foundation in Rotterdam in 2000-2001 as an infrastructural facility, expected to discover, enable, stimulate, coach and integrate art talents from cultural minorities in the mainstream of cult production, with the help of ‘scouts’ and ‘masters’. The focus was on *career advancement of talented individuals* and not on the modification of behavior of the existing cultural institutions. With a new center-right government, the enhancement of intercultural competence became less important and urgent, so that the Ministry of Culture (OcenW) informed the foundation 3 years after founding it that it will be de-funded before the next 4 years subsidy cycle and demanded orderly termination. Nothing came in the place of Phoenix and the Council of Culture as the advisory body of the Ministry left the matter unaddressed. Phoenix obviously has not succeeded during its short existence to build a strong following, so its dismissal caused no uproar and no protests. Typically for the nervous egotism engulfing the Dutch culture world every 4 years, everyone hoped to benefit from the money that came free from Phoenix.

Hardly anyone made a point that Phoenix method of work could have been problematic but that the *modus operandi* of the institution was not redefined and adjusted but rather abruptly and prematurely ended on the basis of political criteria and not professional, methodological criteria. Similarly, the right-wing Rotterdam City Council recently announced the dismantling of the Rotterdam Arts Foundation (RCS) that was for decades the chief innovative laboratory in the municipal cultural policy and developer of new intercultural actions that were later spun off into independent projects or institutions. Again, no uproar, no protests.

Against those setbacks there is the success story of Atana, an independent initiative that acquired modest ministry subsidy. Atana is a program to identify, train and promote individuals coming from at least *double cultural background* for service on boards and advisory committees of cultural institutions and foundations where subsidy, policy and appointment decisions are being made. Such people, usually young professionals not employed in cultural sector, are sought out, actively recruited, offered an intensive package of tours, seminars, meetings, field trips and implanted in the meetings and social and cultural events where managers of cultural institutions mingle. Under the slogan “we don’t trade in lists, we connect people”, Atana placed hundreds of such individuals on various bodies thus strengthening their intercultural competence and hopefully of the organizations and programs they run. It is important to note that most Dutch cultural institutions have boards that are self-appointed and renewed by cooptation and not by appointment from above, which facilitated the process. The initiator, the consultancy QED, has been asked to develop similar programs for education, social care and health systems that are becoming aware that the cultural diversity of their decision making and advisory bodies in no way reflects the demography of their clients.

Institutional flagships and their networks

In some cities one can find specialized cultural institutions that have been developed as flagships of intercultural engagement and competence. Such are the Drum in Birmingham,

Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, KIT and Cosmic in Amsterdam, Rasa in Utrecht and others. Their intercultural engagement is clearly visible in what they produce and program, in the choice of associated artists and in the thematic framing of the program, in the primary audience targets. Despite individual differences, they all develop artistic networks, attract talent from various cultures, enable creative and producing processes and while achieving some trust and credibility they seek to attract and build an intercultural audience. Sometimes, they can't avoid turf wars that have been implicit in the functioning of Cosmic, a small venue in the center of Amsterdam: whose is it or whose should it be in terms of usage of limiting producing and programming capacities it can offer? who will dominate, Turks or Moroccans, Surinamese or Antillian artists? The risk is that the leadership will seek to divide the time slots and capacities, and end up with some *multicultural compromise*, giving each group own share of resources, to each a chunk of schedule, a day in the week and part of the weekend, and miss the opportunity to profile the place through excessive political correctness of time sharing. The other danger is that such flagship institutions remains cordoned off, accepted or "tolerated" as a ghetto, single or multiple, doesn't matter much, deprived of any impact by benign neglect. In any case, they need to break from a narrow cultural minority core audience and appeal to a broader performing arts and music audience. To secure a core audience they probably need to start from a culturally defined niche and then seek to expand beyond rather than to get lastingly pigeonholed in the niche.

Since those cultural organizations that are primarily oriented to the enhancement of interculturalism tend to be very few and fragile, they can profit from joining forces and articulating development strategies jointly, through an informal network. Such networking practice is visible in Fanfare, a network of what the French call *les musiques actuelles*. Initiators work in tough neighborhoods of bigger French cities, on the periphery that is marked by a huge ethnic mix and much clustering of unemployment, poverty, drugs and crime. By bringing in youngsters who are mostly high school drop outs, disoriented and alienated, often on the edge of criminality, around music projects they give them a sense of purpose, identification, self value, pride and feeling of belonging, a cultural and socio-

economic perspective. With much patience and ingenuity, Fanfare professionals insert additional know how, mix music and performing arts practices with learning, connect popular music idioms with other art disciplines and contribute with programs to the community celebrations, feasts and festivals, creating not only intercultural but an intergenerational engagement, overlapping of specific cultural backgrounds, fusion of distinct cultural traditions, innovation in music idioms and overall creativity. Huge neighborhood festivals point out at productive strategies to build social cohesion of underprivileged and disadvantaged communities in a grass root way, via art, empowerment, involvement and transfer of competences.

The Fanfare activists know that they need to be watchful for the seductive corrupting influence of the cultural industry, its enormous absorption power, aiming to create financial capital for the corporations, not social or cultural capital for those underprivileged communities. They face indifference of most music schools, limited support of municipalities and silence of media (except some local radio stations). This is hard local work, a local buildup, but through Fanfare as a network the operators sought to confederate their resources, exchange experiences and good practices, learn from each other and gain more visibility and professional and cultural-political acceptance. For this purpose Fanfare started editing its annuals, *les Cahiers de Fanfare*. A remarkable initiative but the last news is that the French Ministry of Culture has decided to stop subsidizing this unique network.

Conclusion: a matter of citizenship

If there is something like a *malaise* of cultural policy in Europe, today, this is by and large caused by a sense of failure or at least limited achievements of the cultural policies in the last 60 years. The fact that many people and entire societal groups stay away from subsidized culture, its institutions and programs is acknowledged, the appeal of the commercial cultural industry is looked at with some jealousy. Cultural systems in their substantial features have not changed much. Even in Central and Eastern Europe, where sociopolitical and economic changes have been most far reaching, the cultural systems have

been cosmetically touched upon but not radically reformed. Fashionable panaceas offered - *sponsorship, cultural tourism, private-public partnership, creative industries* - have not been translated into policy elements, criteria, mechanisms and procedures, nor have they altered the main streams of the subsidy distribution that continue to flow according to traditional sectors and disciplines and to habitual institutional recipients. Most cultural institutions look at those fashionable buzz words with much puzzlement, receive proportionally less subsidy, esp. against fast raising operational and personnel costs. Behind them, a rapidly growing number of emerging cultural initiatives crowds the tight small project subsidy programs.

Rare are the cultural organizations that have managed to develop mid term strategies to respond effectively and simultaneously to globalization, migration and ICT revolution. Cultural policy makers have been slow to recognize the need to alter their expectations, policies and criteria to a much transformed realities. Enhancement of intercultural competence – more than the euphemistic and neutralist notions such as cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue – could offer them a sense of direction. But there is a necessity to enrich the inherited typology of cultural organizations with the new models, more suitable for today's challenges – not by inventing grand schemes and imposing them top down but by empowerment of the new propulsive initiatives and their gradual institutionalization, their consolidation within networks, consortia and strategic alliances and partnerships, locally and internationally. Enhancement of intercultural competence and demonstrated collaborative capacity could be new key criteria for public support of cultural organizations - if the cultural policy makers succeed to exit the dark forest of identity obsessions, discard the conservative cult of tradition and the vague notions of quality and instead reshape cultural policies in function of the quality of citizenship, on local, regional and national level, but with an aspiration to develop an European and global citizenship as well.

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