

# **Presentation**

## **Bridging the Gaps**

### **1 – Introduction**

There are two main approaches that determine the role of the arts and position it within society. Both the way the arts are being produced and presented to their audiences depends on these primer suppositions.

The 20<sup>th</sup>-century slogan “l’art pour l’art” (art for art’s sake) – stressing that art should engage only with its own intrinsic, conceptual, form related questions and abstract questions is one extreme approach. According to this only true art is divorced from any didactic, moral or utilitarian functions. Within the last 30+ years, this tendency strongly dominated the European/American arts scenes.

However, it can be noticed that since the late 90’s the social and political questions reoccurred in as an artistic topic and found their expression in a vast number of works and initiatives. One of the examples for this approach which can be described as the social engagement of the arts can be the Documenta XI/Kassel 2002 where the political and social topics were dominating in the presented works. Since then a vast number of initiatives and programmes has been and is still being developed with a focus on a possible engagement of the arts in the processes relevant to the society such as social inclusion, combating the stereotypes and xeno- or homophobic attitudes.

The latter approach is the one I would like to concentrate on to analyse briefly the potential of the arts as a communication and educational tool as well as the conditions which need to be provided to enhance this impact on the arts on the societies.

The Arts cannot work in isolation, art has a value to play in a society that cannot be overlooked, but this role has its stimulates and its deterrents. One of the principal concerns in the Gaps in opportunity leads to gaps in society; these gaps are uneven in their distribution, unfair and certainly unsustainable that lead to a lack of social values.

## 2. Arts and the society in modern Ireland

Ireland as a country which over the last 20 years experienced a number of radical changes in terms of its economy, population and education profile, it is a place where also the arts scene underwent a lot of changes. Starting from the on One hand side the country faced an expansion in the cultural offer including more various, contemporary and multicultural productions while on the other side there are still areas of the society which do not participate in this development and still seem not to have enough access to benefit from these new opportunities.

The major question is if this situation is a natural one which would occur in every society or if the appropriate policy and practice could enhance the encounter between the artists, their works and the parts of the society which normally do not participate in it.

It might not seem so, but this encounter has a potential to benefit the socially disadvantaged, the artists and the society as such.

The artists need steady inspiration which can be found through the contact and work in the areas which remain on the periphery of the standard social routine and rules. People living in these areas, especially the youth, are also looking for inspiration, stimulation and encouragement which not necessary can be found in their initial environment. The exchange is as such is an engine for development can benefit society.

## 3 – What is there?

We definitely can state that with the economic changes in Ireland the interest in the arts and the resources available for this are growing.

i.e:

- Arts Council – the main agency providing funding for the arts organisations and the individual projects – (annual funding: 143 organisations, 34 local authorities – 20 million

- Culture Ireland – supporting the projects to present the Irish culture abroad – 4.75 million

Other national projects:

- European Year of Interculturality supervised mostly by NCCRI
- Research carried out by the Create – the national development agency for collaborative arts, which has been commissioned by the Dept of Justice, Equality and Law Reform through the National Action Plan Against Racism, and the Arts Council to undertake research and consultation to provide evidence-based recommendations to the Arts Council to inform Arts Council policy in the area of Cultural Diversity

#### **4 – What is missing?**

- **Policy** - The existing integration programmes are primarily aimed at refugees, asylum seekers and the Irish Traveller community or the provision of basic migrants' needs like housing, employment rights, combating racism need to be extended".<sup>1</sup> The intercultural exchange and cooperation, the potential of art and culture as communication and integration tool enhancing the mutual tolerance, broadening the knowledge and contributing to intercultural cross-fertilisation is well recognised but in terms of activities remains still rudimentary".

#### **- Information –**

- There are not efficient information sources providing the information for the artists (especially from the socially disadvantaged areas or from the newcomers to the country) what kind of programmes is available to them, how can they get support and funding. The current application processes are very complicated.
- There local arts organisations and initiatives are also facing the lack of information on the non-national artists resident in Ireland and their skills and productions.
- There is very little information exchange between the local audiences and arts programmes and the initiatives put together by the ethnic communities and in the socially disadvantaged areas.

#### **5. Recommendation:**

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<sup>1</sup> ibid. p. 153

- Each of these areas requires detailed analysis and solutions. In general what can be stated is the fact that a better distribution of the resources which would flow towards more various and actual projects and not mostly to the to the long existing arts establishments is needed.
- The responsibilities for providing these recourses should not be left to the governmental agencies, but because of the beneficial influence of the arts on the society all areas, especially the business sector should be included to the regular and sufficient participation in the funding procedures.
- The training, consultation and supervision services need to be provided to support the development of the initiatives of the possible highest quality.

## 10 – Social change

Arts can help in social change; it can educate society, add value and show rights issues. Arts can perform the social change, it has to perform the social change, but the quality of the end product has to be of acceptable quality. Arts organisations should be looking to create art that promotes or inspires social change.

Arts can show good people doing good things and also bad people doing bad things; nothing should be excluded. Arts can get a message out into the public domain Everyone has the opportunity to make a change in their way; everyone has the opportunity to make a change in their own lives, everyone has the right to change, everyone is inclusive.

One example is that of **Interculturalism** – an example - **ArtPolonia** – is an organisation facilitating intercultural co-operation and exchange between the Polish Community in Ireland and the local programmes, events and audiences. Focusing on how the cultural environment can be used as a tool to enrich people’s lives, broaden horizons and knowledge as well as to increase capacity for tolerance, communication and mutual understanding.

But why is intercultural exchange important to enhance intercultural cooperation in Ireland?

There are three main reasons why intercultural exchange should be developed and promoted as a vital area in Ireland and other immigration countries:

1. Immigration opens a new dimension of creative cultural potential which needs to be harvested and cultivated.
2. Cultural exchange contributes to cultural cross-fertilisation and helps to eradicate xenophobia and social exclusion.
3. The provision of contact with the home culture stabilises immigrants to a very important extent, giving them the opportunity to present themselves outside of the limited, language-based communication and endow them with continuity with their previous life, values and habits.

Intercultural diversity is still a declaration of good intentions and acknowledgement. While national agencies like the Arts Council, Create and Culture Ireland indicate that within their grant schemes they also include intercultural projects, these opportunities are not immediately visible although they are improving.

An interesting theoretical reference for describing the processes taking place in the new intercultural Ireland seems to be the concept of “transculturality” by W. Welsch. According to Welsch ” the only transculturality can define the processes happening in a culturally diverse society, namely interconnectedness and entanglement. The prefix ‘trans’ characterises the advancement, hybridity and transition of cultural identity through reciprocity and interaction.”

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But this is not just limited to intercultural exchange but to exchange in arts and society generally and the boundaries that people set themselves.

## **11 – No Comment**

So with regards to setting the boundaries, one should argue that there are no boundaries. Really what I am saying is that we should not be afraid to tackle social issues in art. Don't be afraid of tackling real-life issues or marketing these issues through the media or to contact the business about these issues. Look at the major social issues and tackle them.

The Arts needs a voice to speak to the world; Media can provide that voice. However, the media can only survive if it has the funds and resources to do this and also only if there is a public interest receptive to it. Business is one way we can fund the financial side of things, but it is the people who can give the arts a voice.

Together arts, business and people can provide social change. Create social networking partnerships between business and arts that gets the message across. Show that there is something that these partnerships can do to make a difference. The world is a small and interconnected place, so let's project it that way. Through partnerships, we can effect social change.

Everybody has the opportunity to make a change in their way; there is never a right way to make change so try out all possibilities because if we all do what we can within our own spheres and partnerships then together we can close the gaps and make a real difference. Individuals can make a difference. We have the power to close these gaps. We can as a collective group close those gaps and make change a real possibility.

And if we cannot make a difference in the world, then I don't know who can.