



Brokering Migrants Participation in cultural activities

BELGIUM

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Introduction

The main objective of the project Brokering Migrants' Cultural Participation (MCP Broker) is to train Public Cultural Institutions* (PCIs) and to provide them with the tools required to improve their cultural diversity management. At the same time, the project aims at stimulating migrants' cultural participation by strengthening PCIs' capacity to interact with them. MCP Broker is thus a project that studies the role of cultural institutions as actors in migrant-integrating societies.

In a more specific way, the project strives to take local action in order to promote the commitment of receiving communities when interacting with migrants, based on the mutual respect of their rights, obligations and different cultures. Moreover, the project targets equal treatment and better diversity management in the work place, in public and private services, in education, media and other important areas.

As stated in the Open Method Cooperation Report on "The role of public arts and cultural institutions in promoting cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue" (2012- 2013)¹, the diversity of Europe, albeit powerfully enriching, comes with tensions and challenges. Challenges that all the public institutions need to address by going back to their main mission: promoting social cohesion. In this respect, the role of arts and cultural institutions is crucial, as they can trigger a real change from the symbolic and cultural point of view.

MCP Broker builds on the idea that cultural institutions need to question, rethink and improve the way they adapt themselves to the new demographic composition of our society, and to analyse the way they handle the reaction to new cultural and social flows. Central to these tasks is the enhancement of the intercultural strategies of public cultural institutions by diversifying their staff and governance bodies.

Activities

In order to achieve these objectives, 4 activities were put in place in each of the participating countries:

- 1) The development of a benchmarking tool.
- 2) A pilot research where each country had to test the benchmarking tool with 10 – 15 cultural institutions.
- 3) Setting up 24 learning partnership between cultural institutions and organisations from 3 other sectors that take part in the social cohesion: NGO's, educational sector and employment agencies.
- 4) Dissemination of the results

The Belgian situation

Belgium has a federal structure with 3 different official communities: the Flemish, the French and the German-speaking and three different Regions (the Flemish, the Walloon and the Brussels Capital Region). Each community has a different history and background, and has been influenced by its neighbouring country: France, Netherlands and Germany. Their cultural, migration, educational and employment policies have been differently shaped conceptually and so is their

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/culture/library/reports/201405-omc-diversity-dialogue_en.pdf



implementation. Consequently, cultural institutions from the 3 different communities are subject to policies put in place by their own community².

In this respect, the second and third phases of the project were conducted as a laboratory where PCIs and other actors of the social cohesion were questioned about interculturality.

THE BENCHMARKING TOOL

The application in Belgium

The benchmarking tool was developed during the first phase of the project by all partners. 7 chapters were identified: institutional vision and policy, visitors/audiences, programming/repertoire/collections/narrative, partners/collaborators, staff, boards/governing bodies, suppliers.

For each chapter, 4 levels were reported: basic, lower intermediate, upper intermediate and advanced. In order to make the benchmarking tool work, some conditions were identified inside each chapter and each level to allow a certain degree of flexibility and adaptability during its use.

The application of the benchmarking tool to 11 cultural institutions in Belgium was carried out by the Platform for Intercultural Europe (PIE). PIE identified some problems that are stated in the conclusions of the Pilot Study. These results highlighted the need for a refinement of the tool.

The difficulties and the recommendations that arose are reported here as mentioned in the conclusions of the Pilot Study.

- Several benchmarks contain more than 1 condition. Following the initial agreement of the partners, all the conditions had to be met for a benchmark to be considered attained. This problem has been the most frequently found i.e. a PCI fulfilled one condition contained in a benchmark but did not receive any credit for it (examples are reported in the Belgian Pilot Study conducted by PIE).

Recommendation: *the benchmarking needs to be reviewed to remove double conditions as much as possible, i.e. to split double condition benchmarks into 2 different benchmarks. In this way, PCIs achievements could better be credited.*

- Some advanced benchmarks are compatible with lower ones (« and » situation) others exclude lower ones (« either/or » situation). The application shows that it could skew the results.

Recommendation: *Only 1 benchmark level from basic to advanced should be admissible in each subtheme.*

- The benchmark applies better to performing arts institutions than to libraries and museums.

Recommendation: *benchmarks should all become neutral or create different sets of benchmarks for different types of cultural institutions.*

² For more information on this subject see: Collection du Centre des Droits de l'Homme de l'Université Catholique de Louvain, « *Le droit et la diversité culturelle* », sous la direction de Julie Ringelheim, pp. 251-300 « *Une approche différenciée de la diversité? Les politiques d'intégration en Flandre, en Wallonie et à Bruxelles (1980-2006)* », Ilke Adam, 2006

- Benchmarks do not cover all of the efforts that a cultural institution might make with regard to MCP. For example, despite not applying/being able to apply diversity and equality principles to their staff recruitment procedures, some institutions participate in government-sponsored work placements of immigrants and provide them with training in this context.

Recommendation: *review the benchmarks on the basis of new insights and /or allow for the award of « extra points » to the conditions not covered by the benchmarks.*

- The benchmarks leave the size of an institution out of consideration. Many of the benchmarks describe practices, which would only be available to larger institutions with sizeable specialised departments. Smaller institutions can only live up to the spirit of such benchmarks through the informal efforts of their staff.

Recommendation: *Correlate the benchmark evaluation to the size (in terms of budget and staff) of the institution being evaluated.*

The application of the benchmarking tool to 11 cultural institutions in Belgium shows that the management of cultural diversity is performed in very different ways. There are some interesting and innovating experiences; some PCIs do not tackle the topic at all and a large range of PCIs are interested in the topic: they have launched some initiatives and have had to discontinue them for different reasons (i.e. lack of long-term funds or arbitrary decisions).

Nr.	Name	Typology	Benchmarking level
1	KVS	Flemish National Theatre - Brussels	Advanced
2	t'Arsenaal	City Theatre - Mechelen	Upper Intermediate
3	M HKA	Contemporary visual art Museum – Antwerp	Lower Intermediate
4	MIAT	Museum for Industry, Labour and Textiles - Ghent	Lower Intermediate
5	Beursschouwburg	Performing Arts Centre - Brussels	Lower Intermediate
6	Cultuurcentrum Sint-Niklaas	Multidisciplinary Cultural Centre – Sint Niklaas	Lower Intermediate
7	Bibliotheek Gent	Public Library - Ghent	Lower Intermediate
8	BOZAR	Fine Arts Centre - Brussels	Lower Intermediate
9	Wiels	Contemporary Visual Arts Centre – Brussels	Lower Intermediate
10	WP Zimmer	Contemporary dance production space - Antwerp	Basic
11	Erfgoedbibliotheek	Heritage Library - Antwerp	Basic

The benchmarking tool represents a key element because of its great potential: its intention is to raise standards and to lead the way to a transformation and renovation process allowing migrants improved access to cultural institutions.

In this respect a general revision of the benchmarks has to be done taking into consideration a long-term perspective of the efforts that each cultural institution has undertaken.

The adoption of the benchmarking as a self-assessment tool will help the public cultural institutions to analyse cultural diversity management within their own organisation, and to identify obstacles and needs for a better intercultural integration.

Moreover, following the suggestion proposed in the Open Method Coordination Report (January 2014), the European Commission should follow the recommendation for the establishment of an



“Intercultural Label Award”. The revised benchmarking tool could be used to instil a sense of competition in cultural institutions with regard to MCP Broker funds. Ranking the institutions will be necessary to decide which institution is granted with EU funds.

MANAGING CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The Learning Partnerships And The Pilot Study

The experts involved in the Pilot Study and in the Learning Partnerships (LPs) identified tensions and complexities related to interculturality.

During the Pilot study, PCI’s experts were involved in individual interviews where they were questioned about their institutions’ experiences in the light of cultural diversity.

The third phase of the project, composed of 24 Learning Partnerships was a moment of gatherings and dialogue between PCIs and other actors involved in the promotion of social cohesion: NGO’s, the education and the employment sector. This was the occasion for the experts to confront their vision and to share experiences, good practices and difficulties about the management and implementation of interculturality.

All experts agreed in that to allow a comprehensive approach to interculturality, citizens need to regain ownership of the public space. In order to achieve this, a prerequisite is to create cohesion and overcome the underlying competition among actors. Indeed, the LPs highlighted a strong need and willingness to promote a better collaboration, should it be for sharing competencies, information, spaces or tools. This issue needs to be addressed together with the political authorities.

As a result of the implementation of the second and third phase, some keys elements to allow a better management of cultural diversity emerged.

1. Inclusive programmes

Since the core mission of a PCI is to ensure the transfer of cultural heritage across generations, it is not only a moral obligation but also essential for their long-term survival, to become vehicles of social cohesion.

It means that programmes, repertoires, collections and narratives have the duty to offer a lens through which the audiences can interpret their transformative society.

The identity of a PCI is defined by the territory itself and by the relations and policies that withstand from the willingness to create that particular cultural institution in that place. The production of a diversified programme should be shaped to reflect the hybrid surrounding society keeping at the same time, the specificity of each PCI’s identity. It should therefore trend toward interculturality and integrate a significant component of hybridised cultural production. This is a key element to renew the identity of each cultural institution and ultimately to legitimate their existence.

Recommendation: *In keeping alive their own identity, Cultural Institutions need to become activators of culture, places where knowledge is not only transmitted but co-produced, a place that creates and/or offer room for intercultural engagement.*



2. Community development

Knowing its audience is crucial for cultural organisations to be able to propose a tailored program for their public but also to see who is out of the organisation's scope and how to reach this potential public. The Pilot Study and the interviews with different PCIs permitted to see that in the cases where data was available, public was considered as a whole and the analysis was mostly quantitative, living aside the qualitative side.

In addition, since there is a need to better understand the public's composition, it would be suitable to put in place new methods and strategies that take into account the territory and the neighbourhood and can provide with empirical knowledge. On one hand, this could help PCIs to clarify their vision and develop their audiences; on the other hand, taking into account the audience's voice would help avoiding a biased perspective of the territory.

Recommendation: *There is a need of accurate PCI audience's data as well as a demand for an in depth analysis of each PCI's community of reference. This will help to better target the publics (current and potential) and their wishes. It will allow putting in place a strategy enabling the publics to participate to the evaluation of the programmes. Adapted tools and training should also be developed in order to help PCIs to get acquainted with these methods.*

3. Strengthen the networks

During the LPs, experts have strongly insisted on the need for improved collaboration, communication and networking at 2 levels: between organisations and PCIs, and between PCIs and administrations. All the organisations involved in the LPs acknowledged the attempt to set up participatory processes but complained that most of the time the objectives were unattainable.

Recommendations:

- *There is a need for a more structured local democracy strategy in order to build trust between administrations, actors involved in interculturality and migrants' integration. As a pre requisite, local authorities should recognise the strength of a bottom-up approach in permitting and launching such processes to involve organisations but also citizens and foster all citizens' integration.*
- *Cultural institutions should play a key role in the hub where all actors involved in the social cohesion act, perform and collaborate. They should go towards participatory processes, for the definition of programmes and cultural activities.*

4. Human resources

The Pilot Study found out that PCIs' staff is often homogeneous and therefore not representative of a diversified society where it operates. The same goes for the Board of Directors of these organisations. The research shows that most cultural institutions struggle to have a diversified staff and Board. The reasons for this are different. If an institution is part of the city's administration, it might not be able to set the rules for its recruitments. On top of that, opportunities to create new posts in cultural institutions are scarce because of funding cuts, and most of the time the vacancies are filled through internal recruitment. Moreover, diversifying staff requires effort, because it involves ceding power, acknowledging that our societies have changed and that other people should have the opportunity to shape things.



However, a difference between publicly funded PCIs and financially more independent PCIs can be noticed. More independent structures have more power in their recruitment processes and can manage it differently. Some Brussels based cultural institutions have implemented the Actiris Diversity Plan³, the chart for diversity in companies, designed together with Actiris, the Brussels agency for employment.

This charter is an engagement from companies and other organisations to implement a plan for diversity and to make a commitment towards reflecting the composition of society in the organisation itself but also towards non-discrimination in recruiting, evaluating and managing staff members.

However, a timeframe for changes in staff and board has to be outlined. In the short-term diversifying the board should be a more easily achievable goal since the structure is less rigid, whereas for the staff, criteria for diversification and neutrality should be adopted in medium/ long term in recruitment processes.

It is clear that permanent staff and Board need to be as representative as possible of the whole society in all its diversity (gender, age, origins...). It is a social responsibility but beyond that, it creates a new alchemy in the organisation allowing the production of different projects and has its reflection in PCIs' programs.

Recommendation: *Training and Guidelines focusing on neutral diversification's criteria should be adopted during recruitment processes at the federal level and for the 3 Belgian communities in order to raise awareness on diversified staff, making an unbiased selection and give more relevance to competencies.*

5. The education to interculturality

Education to interculturality is a life long learning process that has to be implemented at the earliest possible stage during children's education, raising awareness in order to create active citizenship around interculturality.

As the major civil institution in children's lives, schools have a de facto responsibility to guide their development. Thus, reinvent schools under the lens of interculturality allow to prepare students for a larger range of possibilities, students that will be able to compete for jobs that have not been invented yet.

In general the experts at the LPs identified a need for better coordination between all the actors (schools, political institutions, cultural institutions and associations) in order to build up actions that ensure continuity, allow more efficiency in the long run and lead to common projects.

Recommendations :

- *Schoolbooks should be reviewed and improved and material should be produced in order to include the intercultural message. For example: manuals, curricula, and textbooks both for the teachers and for their students.*
- *Foster the participation of the networks in the schools and local social systems: teachers and pupils cannot be the only actors. They need support to work on interculturality and that requires more staff and bigger budgets. There is a need to provide expertise to existing institutes on intercultural competences, to equip teachers with supportive content and relevant techniques that could prepare the students for life as active, responsible citizens in democratic societies.*

³ For more information see: <http://www.diversite.irisnet.be>

6. Intercultural competencies

The increasing diversity of our society makes them transformative and more dynamic demanding individuals to learn, re-learn and un-learn in order to meet social harmony. The ability to interpret others in a meaningful way helps to promote a pluralistic spirit, to overstep cultural boundaries, and produces self-cultural awareness.

Recommendations:

- *Incorporate intercultural competences at all levels of formal, and informal education systems to facilitate the learning of intercultural competences and to gain flexibility in interactions.*
- *Incorporate the teaching of intercultural competences in programmes and initiatives devoted to a wide range of professions involved in the process of social cohesion and public services. Training and information sessions on interculturality to develop deeper knowledge on the reality on the field should be put in place.*

7. Employment in the cultural sector

In this context, the cultural sector offers a possible career path for many people. Schools could be the starting point of a long-term programme to introduce the cultural sector as an option for employment and prepare pupils to work in the cultural sector. Experts at the LPs identified a real need for coaching and training on career opportunities and obstacles in the short/medium-term. One of the main difficulties is for instance taking into consideration people arriving from other countries with another academic background in any kind of arts or “self-made” artists who developed their artistic skills on their own. This is the reason why experts asked for more transparency, more coherence and clearer dialogues with actors, and a better knowledge of the reality on the field, in order to adapt policies to social cultural and economic realities.

Recommendations:

- *Institutions should cooperate closely with PCI's, employment agencies and grass-root NGO's in order to help both cultural workers and people arrived from other countries, through the codes and rules in place for artists (administrative process, grants and careers opportunities).*
- *Institutions and schools should recognise new art forms.*
- *Schools should improve the understanding of cultural industries and their role in the society as well as the working possibilities that cultural world gives to people.*

8. Funding

The application of the benchmarking tool and the development of the LPs outlined a general lack of long-term vision of the politics in the PCIs and consequently a lack of financial continuity throughout the process. Culture is a key element to foster integration of migrants into society and for local communities to discover other cultures. Interculturality should therefore not be used as a variable for adjustment in the PCIs' budgets.

Recommendation:



- *For a more efficient PCIs' work and to avoid the scattering of financial resources allocated to this issue, interculturalism and migrants' cultural participation should be a base's condition to get access to funds.*
- *Explore the possibilities of putting in place funding schemes for non-legal entities in order to allow access to more informal organisations that are present on the field.*

9. Operational administrative framework

One important statement made by the LPs participants, both PCIs and the rest of involved actors, is that the operational framework is not adapted to the reality on the ground. For instance, administrations are often still organised in silo. This type of organisational scheme brings in added difficulty: it cannot easily integrate cross-sectorial and transversal projects. Moreover, the high level of complexity of calls for projects launched by local authorities is not adapted to the reality of the actors working on interculturality. Indeed, they are often small, frequently with very small teams, which are most of the time working both on the administrative arrangements as well as on the social/cultural activities and sometimes are not qualified enough to deal with the complex processes and rigid operational administrative framework required.

Recommendation:

- *Overstep the rigidity of the administration's organisational scheme towards the promotion of cross-sectorial and transversal projects.*
- *There is a strong need for both providing training to interculturality practitioners, and to adapt the operational framework to the specificities of interculturality. This would allow a more efficient and accurate work.*

Conclusions

Belgian context is quite peculiar: the presence of 3 different communities and 3 different regions rather autonomous on implementing cultural, social and economic policies, makes the analysis of MCP relatively challenging and complex.

Despite this, the experts involved have warmly welcomed the management of cultural diversity. The Benelux region has historically been highly interested in mobility. Over the last 3 decades Belgium has become a country of permanent settlement for many different types of migrants. Thus, interculturality – in all the aspects that it involves - is at the core of the grass-rooted organisations that are engaged in a continuous promotion of MCP. This represents a great potential because of its diverse nature; Belgium is a country where collaboration and cooperation among the 3 regions and the 3 communities could play a role of 'interculturality incubator' and a constant laboratory for negotiation.

According to this, a general recommendation that all experts involved in this project outlined, is the fact that both the organisations and the administrations should get out of their comfort zone and take more risks in collaborating and financing the 'less visible' and 'less spectacular' allowing an accessibility to funds to a larger range of organisations.

However, the public cultural institutions involved in the project were diverse in their size and their typology and in general, except some very interesting experiences, they do not consider migrants' cultural participation as a key element in their institutional policies. Nevertheless there is a high awareness and interest in implementing transversal relations that could lead to the creation of negotiating spaces for encounter.