



RAINBOW PLATFORM
civil society platform for intercultural dialogue



Practice makes perfect

a learning framework for Intercultural Dialogue

The Rainbow Paper

from the Civil Society Platform for Intercultural Dialogue

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Contents

Part One: A principled approach	p. 3
(i) The Rainbow Platform and Paper	p. 3
(ii) A possible definition of Intercultural Dialogue	p. 4
(iii) Some emerging 'principles'	p. 5
(iv) Targets	p. 8
Part Two: A progressive approach	p. 9
(i) The Rainbow Platform - An emerging movement	p. 9
(ii) A progressive and distinctive process	p. 9
(iii) A work programme	p. 10
(iv) Legacy	p. 12
Closing remarks	p. 13

Part One: A principled approach

“What you learn depends upon whom you study with; if you study with a butcher you’ll never learn to be shoemaker...”, Chinese saying

(i) The Rainbow Platform and the Rainbow Paper

The Civil Society Platform for Intercultural Dialogue (referred to hereafter as the Rainbow Platform) is an initiative to bring together organisations from different civil society policy sectors to *‘share effective Intercultural Dialogue practices and to engage with the political process under the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008 and beyond’*.

The Platform was launched jointly by the European Cultural Foundation (ECF) and the European Forum for the Arts and Heritage (EFAH) at the end of 2006, and brings together over 200 European and national civil society organisations from a wide range of sectors (youth, culture, social affairs, life-long learning, human rights, etc). The unifying drive is to learn from each other and to explore possible future crossovers. A stated objective of the Platform is to engage in the political process around these issues. EFAH hosts the secretariat. The Platform is supported by the Network of European Foundations (NEF).

While both the initial impetus and indeed the specific funders’ interests are linked to the arts and culture in Europe², projects and experiences considered inside the Platform do not have to have a pre-existing arts link. The Platform is truly cross-sectoral in this sense and both Platform participants and its steering group have endorsed this principle.

The Platform process was carried out through meetings, an on-line consultation, retreat workshops and a multi-stage drafting process. A Europe-wide consultation document in four languages set the basis for this paper by asking how to improve and encourage Intercultural Dialogue; the results (130 submissions from 28 countries) were analysed and submitted to a 30-strong working group for a three day session of ideas development, the extraction of common cross-sectoral viewpoints and suggestions for further work. This then formed the basis of a recapitulative paper, which was submitted to consultation and feed back to a drafting group of 18. The following document presents both the common viewpoints and some ideas on further work (in general and as envisaged for the Platform itself). It is not formally endorsed by any Platform participant organisation.

It has become clear that the added value of the Platform is to connect different approaches to Intercultural Dialogue and to create solidarity of effort and optimism about the possibility of progressing our identities further towards better interaction becoming the human norm.

² In an article for Le Magazine of The European Commission’s Directorate-General for Education and Culture, it was stated that: EFAH and the ECF have “*a particular interest in demonstrating that art and culture have a special role in [Intercultural Dialogue] because they question prejudices and stereotypes, break taboos, trigger curiosity, play with images and words, inspire and connect. They have the potential to give an inspirational and educational dimension to political endeavors, and can provide the spark for citizens to become interested in the challenge of Intercultural Dialogue.*”

In other words, the very existence of the Platform has proved a great opportunity to articulate some key issues and create an early sense of common purpose. In the words of Petra Föhrenbach; “*The diversity of the Platform is itself a chance. Especially the cross-sectoral contacts, exchanges, discussions and impulses it can provide, may lead to a re-politicisation of cultural work and in exchange to more down-to earth strategies of the political movement.*” (Comment after her participation in the retreat)

(ii) A possible definition of Intercultural Dialogue

The Rainbow Platform takes as its starting point the definition of Intercultural Dialogue in the Council of Europe’s White Paper³ and has refined it down to a practical position for its work. It is important to stress that this is only a starting point; one of the key aims of the year is to rework, enrich, criticise and develop this definition.

Intercultural Dialogue under the Rainbow Platform’s work programme is a series of specific encounters, anchored in real space and time between individuals and/or groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, with the aim of exploring, testing and increasing understanding, awareness, empathy, and respect.

The ultimate purpose of Intercultural Dialogue is to create a cooperative and willing environment for overcoming political and social tensions, whether through new or existing structures (administration, governance, public opinion, values, attitudes)⁴.

Two points need to be made here:

- ◆ The Platform is interested in actual, facilitated encounters on the ground between cultures. It is committed to learning from practice, with all the richness of human interaction, and not to impose solutions or expectations on practitioners. Of course the Platform takes as its starting point the acquired expectations and value systems of democracy, the rule of law and human rights as embodied in the Council of Europe and its acquis⁵.
- ◆ The Platform believes that the emergent good practice from real encounters needs to be translated into both wider social policy considerations and also into a commitment to change and to reduce inequality on the part of policy makers. This bridging of practice, learning and policy constitutes one of the progressive characteristics of the Platform.

³ I.e. ‘an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage.’

⁴ Intercultural Dialogue must acknowledge historical facts such as colonialism, war etc, but not remain stuck in these reflections and seek to move beyond them to practical solutions to encourage respectful interaction.

⁵ The Platform is grateful to the Council of Europe for its work in this area, and offers due thanks for the material and background to its own work.

(iii) Some emerging ‘principles’

The work of the Platform thus far has allowed us to draw out some common viewpoints across the breadth of the Platform participants.

It is important to stress that these ‘principles’ are extrapolations from the Platform debates and submissions; they are not policy-level statements, which everyone must sign up to. The quotation marks around ‘principles’ are deliberate. There has been some discussion as to whether these are *principles* of action or *viewpoints* or elements of a *consensus*, but what is important is that they represent an early statement of common interests amongst the Platform participants.

Each of the ‘principles’ leads to tentative recommendations about the future work of the Platform. These recommendations are pragmatic and time bound, i.e. they represent the foundations of a work programme for the Platform during the course of 2008, and are not a longer-term commitment. Indeed, the special strength of the Platform is to recognise that these principles will change over the year.

1. The Platform recognises Intercultural Dialogue as an important topic for multi-sectoral civil society at national and international levels and a key area of debate, policy and practice:

Therefore the Platform calls on its participants to engage actively with the issue, to work with the Platform as a pro-active “open space” to develop projects, and to contribute to the emerging work in the area.

2. The Platform believes that Intercultural Dialogue as a topic and political project needs to be addressed within practical limits:

Therefore, the Platform proposes that its Intercultural Dialogue work should focus on the issues of migration⁶, and the encounter between majority and minority cultures (however that is defined). The Platform is particularly interested in places where the minority or majority culture suffers from economic, social, educational, or aspirational inequalities and tensions.

3. The Platform understands the political implications of intercultural work and believes that the underlying aim of Intercultural Dialogue must be to reduce social, economic and political tensions:

Therefore, we propose that the Platform aims at actions that are about more than celebrating the “flowering” of cultures, but about managing, reducing or eliminating inequality and injustice.

4. The Platform would like to stress the links to citizenship, rights & responsibilities; culture, diversity and democracy are intimately connected (both positively and negatively at a moment of growing fragmentation and tension):

⁶ This is obviously relevant to both historical and contemporary migration; even long established minority communities and majority cultures have inherited or indeed renewed cultural difficulties under contemporary pressures.

Therefore, we would like to state formally the links between culture, dialogue and citizenship. We want to explore further how such a multi-sectoral partnership can work with other democratic institutions.

5. The Platform is keen to join up grass root projects and larger scale work, working outwards in concentric circles from the individual, through groups to the wider community and society:

The Platform suggests working with language from the field of developing social capital articulated and promoted by Robert Putnam⁷, otherwise known as the Building, Bonding and Bridging model. *Building* refers to developing individual skills, knowledge and cultural autonomy; *Bonding* refers to the development of links and solidarity within groups, and *Bridging* refers to facilitating the relationships between different individuals/groups at the social level⁸. This is a recognised framework in the social sector that aims to improve community initiative, responsibility, and adaptability⁹.

6. The Platform puts a strong emphasis on language and concepts. Intercultural Dialogue must not just take place between different sets of elites, but must also be between people of different levels of education, different mind-sets, and different horizons and different attitudes:

Therefore, the Platform would like to work with the Platform participants to develop (or recuperate) innovative, clear language around Intercultural Dialogue, one that would invite wide participation. Part of this will be to refine an agreed set of common principles for work in the area.

7. The Platform clearly wishes to focus on education both formal and informal¹⁰, both life-long and life-wide (as opposed to narrow curriculum-based) learning about other cultures:

Therefore, we suggest that a committed alliance in this area be created between educational providers at the national level and Platform organisations.

8. The Platform believes that Intercultural Dialogue can occur in many places: home, school, public and private space, etc.:

Therefore, the Platform would like to explore how space for Intercultural Dialogue can be made accessible. What options do existing organisations have for sharing space? How valuable is it to develop specific Intercultural Dialogue centres? Is it only a question of resources?

9. The Platform shows great readiness to work cross-sectorally. Intercultural Dialogue is a cross-disciplinary and multi-sectoral issue although some sectors are less involved in such partnerships:

⁷ Robert Putnam, 'Bowling Alone', 2000, Simon and Schuster.

⁸ The central thesis of social capital theory is that 'relationships matter'. The central idea is that 'social networks are a valuable asset'. Interaction enables people to build communities, to commit themselves to each other, and to knit the social fabric. A sense of belonging and the concrete experience of social networks (and the relationships of trust and tolerance that can be involved) can, it is argued, bring great benefits to people. See John Field, 2003.

⁹ The Platform would take this as its starting point and would of course be open to development and change throughout the year. There is an implication that this work is progressive – i.e. it moves from the individual, through the group to wider society (although the Platform will be keen to see if this is the case in practice).

¹⁰ Informal refers to both the learning outside of educational institutions but also the problem of accessing people who are not included in the educational process at all (for example women in some communities).

Therefore we promote the idea of partnerships between all sectors of the community, and organisations, which represent all democratic social interests.

10. The Platform has an awareness of and considerable interest in developing practical policy recommendations in tandem with policy makers. In other words, Intercultural Dialogue needs effective synergies between grass roots players on the one hand and institutional and political levels on the other:

Therefore the Platform will work to understand, promote and celebrate the concept of partnership with policy makers to deliver Intercultural Dialogue and find language to encourage national and European administrations to support such projects and actions.

11. The Platform believes that the work in 2007 and over the course of 2008 should strengthen the fledgling Intercultural Dialogue movement in all sectors:

Therefore the Platform would like to support the movement by identifying good or effective practice; by bringing some of the key players together; by articulating a conceptual framework and finally by communicating this work to opinion leaders, policy makers and possible funders. To build a movement requires common goals, common language, common values, a common timetable and common targets for change.

12. The Platform sees its work as a new and perhaps even innovative model of participatory learning and decision-making:

Therefore the Platform would like to understand, concretise, and promote this learning model, which is non-hierarchical, with a floating membership and which represents many different sectors of practice. One way to do this would be to develop an Intercultural Dialogue work cycle, which involves preparation, encounter, reflection on the encounter, and feedback. The Platform is itself an exercise in Intercultural Dialogue and seeks to generalise its learning to the wider environment.

(iv) Targets

The Rainbow Platform and the Reader¹¹ have allowed us to identify some key partners:

- ◆ End users (i.e. disadvantaged and excluded groups between themselves and between and with majority cultures) are the most important targets. The Platform sees the process of Intercultural Dialogue and the emergence of good practice as being vital for Platform participants, as a chance to learn and share experience, but primarily wants to see the impact being registered and communicated to the groups and individuals on the ground who live within situations of social, cultural and economic inequality.
- ◆ Education is seen as an important vector both to explore and to communicate Intercultural Dialogue practice.
- ◆ Religious, and in particular Inter-religious organisations and networks are priority actors in this area, with the unspoken belief that the clash of religious values may become a flash point area for Intercultural Dialogue.
- ◆ The Cultural and Arts sector in general is recognised as a particularly interesting partner for Intercultural Dialogue with organisations whose main focus is not cultural.
- ◆ Media and media literacy are seen as areas that require new thinking and some innovative approaches.
- ◆ Public institutions are key to creating the policy, within which the civil society sector might achieve Intercultural Dialogue, and to mainstreaming policy i.e. there is recognition of the need to engage with systems at the macro level through public decision makers.

¹¹ The Rainbow Reader is the compendium of all proposals submitted to the Platform's consultation and was a useful tool in developing the principles and the work programme.

Part Two: A progressive approach

“One’s destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things”
Henry Miller

(i) The Rainbow Platform – an emerging movement

The Platform process to date has not just provided answers; it also ended up raising some complex questions. There are challenges inside this kind of cross-sectoral, multi-disciplinary, multi-lateral approach; the Rainbow Process as a whole demonstrated a degree of uncertainty, and some differences in opinion as to where and with whom Intercultural Dialogue ought to be practiced. The terrain is still being cleared, the work still being planned, the horizons still being scanned for opportunities.

However, the Platform’s approach is also the true image of a participatory democracy. The Platform welcomes the opportunity it now has to examine the validity of Intercultural Dialogue as a model for interaction between the institutional and civil society levels.

To recapitulate, the Platform’s work over the course of 2007 enabled the steering group to:

- ◆ Articulate and clarify the issues,
- ◆ Highlight weaknesses and strengths in attitudes and behaviours,
- ◆ Build a sense of common purpose,
- ◆ Sketch the framework for a set of agreed principles,
- ◆ Devise a feasible work programme.

The important next step is to move this into an agenda for action.

(ii) A progressive and distinctive process

A very important outcome of the past year has been to develop a fledgling sense of common purpose amongst the Platform participants without which nothing lasting can be achieved.

One of the Platform and the paper’s most progressive contributions is perhaps to anchor the thinking in the Platform membership, which is itself a fluid and evolving structure. The Platform participants create the opportunities for Intercultural Dialogue, implement the work and learn on a daily basis.

It is essential that the work of the Platform in 2008 focus on achieving usable outcomes that can improve the effectiveness of this work. The model adopted is one of ‘*emergent understanding and practice*’. Rather than imposing policy on the sector, the Platform will ‘accompany’ the sector in its learning and discussion throughout 2008, comparing ideas and methodologies with the on-the-ground ground experience, with the aim of refining our understanding and developing new toolkits¹². Note that behind this seemingly innocuous statement lies a very challenging agenda for public policy makers. Can we find ways to watch, understand and analyse on-the-ground practice and relate it to broader contexts, through tool kits, standards, good practice and policy recommendations?

Thus the Rainbow Platform and Rainbow Paper aims to be progressive in a number of ways by:

- ◆ Focusing on practitioners and their work,
- ◆ Encouraging learning to emerge throughout the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue,
- ◆ Aiming to place partnership as a central tool kit in Intercultural Dialogue,
- ◆ Looking beyond cultural difference and towards issues of political and economic inequality.

The Platform believes that the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue is a “catapult event” that can give visibility to issues and social groups and practices and that it can serve to create a momentum. The Platform hopes to unveil new learning, new projects and new methodologies at the end of the year as part of suggesting a way forward for the future.

(iii) A work programme

The Platform knows that aside from commitment, four things are needed for Intercultural Dialogue to happen; skills, places, evaluation and continuity, or follow up to anchor projects in a longer-term social change.

1. Skills:

One possible and very useful output of the Platform would be to develop a better understanding of what the core set of competencies in this domain would be. Such skills might include:

- Languages,
- Historical and religious knowledge,
- Non conflictual communication techniques, etc.,
- Training for education specialists,
- Awareness training,
- Non verbal communication skills,
- Soft skill sets (empathy and anxiety reduction).

¹² Taking of course into account other projects to do the same thing, such as the Council of Europe’s Training Kit on Intercultural Learning: <http://www.youth-knowledge.net/INTEGRATION/TY/Publications/tkits/tkit4/index.html>.

- 2. Places:** *Some mapping is needed of where Intercultural Dialogue can happen and how such environments can be made available.*
- 3. Evaluation:** *Evaluation is here understood in the sense of an ongoing virtuous circle of setting objectives, implementing, monitoring, feedback, learning, and refining objectives in order to build a better case for future work and more effective implementation.*
- 4. Continuity:** *Intercultural Dialogue is not a quick fix; projects take time and investment to develop and mature and bear fruit. From the perspective of the Rainbow Platform investment implies future social and community returns. Building lasting partnerships between public institutions and NGOs must be central. The Rainbow Platform hopes to develop language (and confidence) to advocate for strong support to NGOs in a wide range of areas¹³.*

The distinctive approach of the Platform in 2008 can be summed up as:

- ◆ Focussing on a defined area,
- ◆ Basing its work in practice,
- ◆ Aiming always at articulating common learning,
- ◆ Moving towards improved methodologies.

The working plan of the Platform is around these areas (depending on Platform resources):

- ◆ To accompany or track a selected group of projects relevant to the Platform,
- ◆ To develop further the network of informed collaborators,
- ◆ To develop a number of general learning outputs, for example a prototype toolkit on Intercultural Dialogue (principles of action, ethical framework working methods),
- ◆ To refine the viewpoints included in the Rainbow Paper into definite principles,
- ◆ To disseminate the results and promote the most relevant learning.

We hope that the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue will help the sector to perform more effectively in this area by developing practical language, practical tools, practical recommendations, a practical communication strategy.

The work programme for the Rainbow Platform is thus a mix of activities, ranging from conceptual and managerial to communicating results and advocating for further support for Civil Society actors and organisations.

¹³ For example, the Rainbow Paper already makes clear that Intercultural Dialogue could be an element in a long-term European policy of multilateral understanding and engagement as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The key question is; can Intercultural dialogue perhaps be a more efficient, cost effective, long-term option for policy makers trying to work with the European Neighbourhood area. Could it become a complementary tool kit to more traditional external affairs mechanisms, as part of a recognised European soft power resource?

(iv) Legacy

The European Year of Intercultural Dialogue and the Rainbow Platform project are an opportunity for the sector to engage with these challenges at the European level. But the project will only be at the *end of the beginning* in December 2008. The key issue is its potential legacy.

The Civil Society Platform considers it a priority to create a legacy i.e. longer-term work leading to sustainable outputs. Although the Platform does not seek to play a leadership role, nor a monitoring role, it does wish to support practical longer-term outputs.

Some practical legacy outputs from the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue might include:

- ◆ Good practice models (including training manuals and glossaries),
- ◆ More *refined ideas around evaluation*¹⁴,
- ◆ Policy recommendations for local, national and European administrations,
- ◆ Suggestions for funding routes (especially for small scale and micro projects)¹⁵,
- ◆ Renewed connections into the other organizations and institutions (such as the Council of Europe, the European Union institutions and the key foundations, academies and NGOs),
- ◆ Heightened media awareness.

¹⁴ Evaluation is one of the most vexed issues in social policy, and no generally validated evaluation models as yet exist. The Platform does not intend creating one. But it does intend investigating and extending the conversation to new actors, and discussing the possible evaluation framework relevant to this area, in order to make some suggestions for future work.

¹⁵ Note, this is about funding strategies options, not specific funding suggestions. The Platform can, in the first instance, do no more than try to understand the range of options and languages and skills base necessary to develop secure funding.

Closing remarks

There is a concept in Chinese art almost unknown to the Western tradition. Called ‘walking perspective’, it allies realism with continual change. Chinese artists of the classical period created landscapes that unrolled before the eye of the viewer, as the scroll itself unrolled, from right to left, and the viewer was invited to contemplate the emerging glory of the artist’s vision, mountains, streams, clouds, white spaces containing men sitting by streams and girls washing their hair - taking in detail after detail while holding in mind the overall landscape. One of the key features of walking perspective is empty space. This space holds all the disparate elements in a creative tension, allows the mind to rest, and comforts and reminds us that, ultimately, everything returns to nothingness, both the mountains and the man.

Intercultural Dialogue must not become a diversion from the on-going task of building the structures of Europe wide equity, justice and fairness. Intercultural Dialogue is not about developing symbolic cultural politics to appease cultural sensitivities. The Platform believes that Intercultural Dialogue can become one of the ways we talk about and address inequality and tension. The Platform hopes that the project will be a walk through the emerging landscape of Intercultural Dialogue, focusing on details where possible, drawing back to view the wider picture on a regular basis and always looking for the essential proportion to be discovered between vision, ambition, hope and reality.

We may not always be able to define clearly what we have experienced, and yet we still know it to be life changing, valid and true. The Rainbow Platform participants are in the thick of the daily process of creating Intercultural Dialogue; watching it, feeling it, making it *happen*. The challenge that faces us all in the work over the next year is to put this individual experience into a form, a language, a mindset that can be communicated. We must seek to remember how Intercultural Dialogue fits into the wider spaces of social relationships. We must therefore be careful, in the middle of our work, to leave some empty space for people to occupy the picture...



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