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INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCIES IN THE CREATIVE CITY

Nelly van der Geest

1. Introduction

An experiment is currently unfolding in Europe's major cities, to determine how people from totally different backgrounds can relate to each other and make a contribution to the socially responsible, sustainable development of those cities. For this reason, it is essential that consideration be given to the incorporation of cultural diversity as part of the evolution of the creative city. I have summarised this in the form of a formula: creative city + diversity = diverse city. The latter is a creative city in which the diversity of the cultural sector acts as its engine (Van der Geest, 2005).

Lambooy refers to the ability of a city, its inhabitants and organisations to adapt to new circumstances and to create opportunities from them as its 'competence base' (Lambooy, 2005: 54). Given the questions currently arising in European cities, an intercultural domain may also be defined within this competence base. Klaić views intercultural competencies as a basic feature of culture: "Culture... is a dimension of community and personal life, a source of expression, freedom, creativity, values, lifestyles, social cohesion and intercultural competencies" (Klaić, 2005: 50). The extrapolation of this concept of intercultural competencies is the essence of this article.

In what follows, I look at the range of commentary on intercultural competencies in section 2, including a study conducted by two aspiring cultural managers, Olga Klöne and Lisa Donia. They have identified what the cultural field itself considers to be intercultural competencies, and how education might respond to this. In section 3, I briefly consider educational programmes for entrepreneurs, and in section 4, I provide a checklist for an inclusive strategy.

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2. Commentary on Intercultural Competencies

Dragan Klaic and Ria Lavrijsen are prominent commentators featuring in the literature concerning intercultural competencies. Klaic cites the following typical aspects:

“Respect for other cultures, for the plurality of surrounding cultures, curiosity to get acquainted with other cultures, to explore and seek intercultural engagements in sustained series of creative processes and acts, and the expectation to be enriched through this exploration.” (Klaic, 2001)

Lavrijsen draws a distinction between five areas in which intercultural competencies ought to be assigned a place: entrepreneurship, customer and target group focus, responsibility for achievements, focus on collaboration, and relational sensitivity.

“Interculturalisation’ requires that taboos be overthrown and demands an approach which is aimed at the exploration of the adventurous and unpredictable. What is necessary is that people develop an ability to imagine what could be but which does not yet exist. People need to be willing to examine matters with which they are not yet familiar. This demands considerable, profound commitment. The latter presupposes ‘selection’ and this in turn assumes that you know what you want. Committing yourself to something means that you can show what you have decided in favour of, and are able to expose yourself, to reveal your personality and to assume responsibility.” (Lavrijsen, 2003)

Clóne and Donia’s Study

Olga Klóne and Lisa Donia spoke to 11 artists and cultural entrepreneurs active in the Netherlands as part of their study: five men and six women representing five indigenous people, and six immigrants, two of whom are Western and four who are not. The youngest was born in 1981 and the oldest in 1951. All cultural disciplines were represented. Their most striking conclusions were that all of the interviewees felt that it was important that their outlook reflected their society, although only one-third expressed this in concrete terms through acquisition policy. These 11 people also had their own personal definition of what the most relevant intercultural competencies are in their profession. Self-awareness and respect for other cultures were frequently cited.

A striking feature of their responses was a failure to translate intercultural competencies into professional skills or expertise. Aspects of attitude were almost exclusively mentioned. Many of the respondents felt that, to acquire such an attitude, it was essential to experience the position of a minority or an outsider. Examples of their learning curve were growing up as the only Catholic in a Mormon community, or emigrating from the British countryside to the Randstad conurbation in the Netherlands. Acquiring the language and codes of your new environment and being able to compare them to your origins, helps to develop self-awareness and respect for other cultures. None of the respondents felt that having an ethnic background in itself produced an intercultural attitude. Experience had to be combined with self-reflection.

Round table discussion

In the course of the round table discussion held in response to the study, the translation of an intercultural attitude into professional expertise and skills was felt to be the real challenge facing cultural education. Understanding the translation process between different languages and cultures was felt to be an indispensable aspect of this:

“Language is an important component. Being able to translate between different situations requires that you as a student have mastered a number of languages and codes, if you are to be aware of what is at stake in such a process of translation. Here language is used in the narrow sense of a national language and in the metaphorical sense of a different pictographic language. A second aspect took the form of ‘possessing knowledge of the different perspectives from which people think about the role of art in their life and society’. This knowledge also covers your own perspective: the ‘ability to name your own underlying premises and what they are based on.’” (Report of Round Table Discussion, 14 February 2006)

Where it concerned the creation of inclusive knowledge, the round table discussion participants placed the emphasis predominantly on the translation process and on comparative strategies, but not on the transfer of knowledge itself.

When it comes to professional skills, an intercultural attitude should produce diversity in organisational structures, in your mission and strategic policy, in the markets and in the quality of the relevant products. With regard to the latter, the study conducted by Klöne and Donia, the managing director of a games company has this to say:

“I deliberately work with a varied team. This gives rise to ideas which are understood and accepted around the entire world. It is possible to build bridges between the various cultures.”

The round table discussion participants ascribe intercultural competencies to individuals, as well as organisations. They envisage a permanent learning and reflective capacity on the part of creative professionals and organisations. This capacity for learning is fed by aspects of attitude, as well as a clearly defined view of diversity and knowledge of the role played by art and works of art from non-Western cultures, and the ability to express this view in action.

3. Educational Programmes for Cultural Entrepreneurs

At the HKU, the curricula for educational programmes for cultural entrepreneurs (thoroughly revised in 2005) utilise general competency designations without the multi-cultural context being raised explicitly. Six ‘Ps’ constitute the backbone of the curricula, which focus on competencies: methodical action involving products; the ability to use the language and codes of your field of operation (profession); focussing on self-development (person); the ability to com-

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municate (presentation); the ability to network (personal networking); and the ability to work (process).

None of the detailed explanations mention aspects that play a role in a global, culturally diverse community. The aspect of knowledge, already noted as raw material for an intercultural attitude in the round table discussion, has not yet been implemented in the training programmes for cultural entrepreneur. Although the concept of 'language and codes' is used, the question remains: whose professional language will we be speaking, and whose codes do we need to be familiar with as a cultural entrepreneur?

Nevertheless, the department is seeking to extend the intercultural aspect as part of the educational programmes. The latter is being pursued by bringing students into contact with clients who themselves have a dual cultural background, or who wish to reach diverse target groups.

4. A Checklist for Working Inclusively

Research reveals that the cultural field feels intercultural competencies are interesting, but there appears to be a disparity between theory and action. The cultural sector largely assumes that intercultural competency is an aspect of attitude. Educators also believe that a number of basic conditions are required in terms of skills and expertise. The ability to become intimately acquainted with an array of meanings for a 'translation process' constitutes the key aspect.

Remarkably, educational programmes covering the arts appear to be hesitant about explicitly advancing intercultural competencies in their outcomes. Jans refers to artists who turn to art via non-Western routes through life as 'invisible others' (Jans, 2006: 175). These invisible others are only marginally revealed in cultural educational programmes. Few are trained, and graduates from cultural educational programmes are only equipped for diversity to a limited extent. Revealing the wealth of a variety of talented people will enlarge the competence base and hence the opportunities for developing a creative city.

Like many cultural institutions, most educational programmes view themselves as organisations of learning, that is to say, that they reflect on their practical knowledge in order to produce new knowledge. The input of skills and expertise in the field of cultural diversity may cause practical knowledge to grow in this area. I have drawn up a list of 13 points requiring attention, which encourage diversity in the work of the cultural sector. These points are as follows.

Diversity of the products

I Programming and Team Formation 1: Showing One's Colours

If you present people with a platform to use for the purposes of saying something about their views or work, examine the type of speakers and presenters that you have. Are all of them from an ethnic background? Are they all men? Are they all in their fifties? Do they all represent a specific point of view? By default, allocate different types of roles to different types of people, also the less obvious ones.

II Programming and Team Formation 2: Subconscious Discolouration

Is there an established link between specific subjects and your speakers' backgrounds, for example, a theoretical framework in the case of men, stories about experience in the case of people with a dual cultural background, a light-hearted moment in your programme in the case of youth and sharing in the case of people over 50 years of age? What do you confirm by means of established links between person and substance? Is this what you want?

III Programming and Team Formation 3: No Exemplary Role for a Team

Avoid a situation in which members of a team are forced to assume an exemplary role of the social group to which they belong. Be aware of the majority-minority rule. Only if 30% of your team consists of 'others', will the remaining 70% see any differences between these various other people and treat them more as individuals than as symbols (Moss Kanter, 1977).

Collaboration and process

IV Organisation 1: Do What You Believe in

Ensure that your project team is as diverse as the image portrayed by your programme.

V Organisation 2: You Will Get the Audience That You Attract

Ensure that your programme holds interest for the diversity of the audience that you are seeking to reach. In this respect remember that you may move the boundaries.

VI Organisation 3: Growth

Provide a number of newcomers who reflect the diversity that you are seeking to achieve, with the opportunity to boost their professionalism within your organisation and supervise this process.

Focus on surroundings

VII Audience Reach 1: Create New Opportunities for Meeting People

Do not think of your audience as a homogenous mass. Examine what type of audience you have. Do you feel it is varied enough? A more diverse audience could produce added value for the dynamism of your programme. Your audience will often find it pleasant to meet people with whom they do not readily come into contact on a daily basis. Create such opportunities to meet.

VIII Audience Reach 2: Go beyond Your Own Network

If you do not have a varied audience but you would like one, contact a number of people in your team whom you would like to involve in this, and ask them whether they find your facilities appealing (change them if it makes sense to do so) and whether they would like to bring a number of people who are part of their own network with them.

IX Audience Reach 3: Learn from the Mood Prevailing Elsewhere

People from culturally diverse networks greatly appreciate having verbal contact immediately. Inform them directly or through scouts. Look for them in those places where they are in the majority. Look around and examine how you feel there, and use this as information for the mood that you will be developing in your own programme, scheme or organisation.

X Audience Reach 4: Aim for 30%

Ensure that people who are part of a minority account for at least 30% of your audience.

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XI Audience Reach 5: Maintain Direct Contact

If you invite a number of people who are part of a minority and they do not arrive, call them and ask them why they did not do so. This will yield a great deal of information about the accessibility of your facilities: the time, the mood, and the obstacles.

XII Audience Reach 6: Maintain Direct Contact

Maintain contact with the people who come.

Learning organisation and reflection

XIII Learning Organisation 1: Ask for Advice

Interpret the creation of diversity as a process. Learn from your mistakes. Seek contact with networks of people who are part of a minority in your organisation or ask these people for advice.

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