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Forum on Intercultural Dialogue

Discussion paper based on the Forum

Organised by the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe in co-operation with the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe in partnership with the Youth Express Network and with the support of the Council of Europe

A contribution to the All Different, All Equal Campaign

Written by Andreas Karsten and Bastian Küntzel

Introduction

«Clarity of purpose is a sweet weapon against confusion.»

Toke Moeller

This paper is not the report of a seminar or the documentation of a training course. It is also not a re-print of some main conclusions of the ‚Forum on Intercultural Dialogue‘ that brought together activists from international non-governmental organisations and practitioners from local level grassroots organisations. And it is certainly not an official position paper of the Conference of INGOs or the Advisory Council on Youth, the two major non-governmental bodies of the Council of Europe that co-operated to organise the forum. Well - what is it, then?

It is a discussion paper bringing together the thinking and ideas that lead to the forum with the experiences expressed and discussions held at the forum itself. It possibly is, in some ways, an unusual document – written by a general rapporteur with the invitation to be subjectively opiated and critically reflective and meant to be rather a recollection of ideas and discussions than a typical report.

That said, the organisers considered this to be an adequate way of using the potential of the forum to make a meaningful contribution to the soaring discussions on intercultural dialogue – a field of policy, research and practice with increasing importance:

The Third Summit of the Heads of States and Governments of the Council of Europe has decided to increase its efforts in this field. The European Union has declared 2008 to be the ‘Year of Intercultural Dialogue’. UNESCO, the United Nations, media, research institutes, universities, national governments and local communities: they are all discussing intercultural dialogue.

And so are we! Together with the Youth Express Network and with the support of the Council of Europe we brought together activists and practitioners to explore intercultural dialogue from the perspective of civil society. Aged between 21 and 62, the unusual mixture of members of local organisations from around Strasbourg and international associations from all over Europe turned out to be an inspiring – and inspired – constellation.

We hope that our combined thinking will also inform and inspire the emerging ‘White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue’ of the Council of Europe as well as other discourses and discussions on intercultural dialogue.



Bastian Küntzel
On behalf of the team

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«It is not the answer that enlightens,
but the question.»
Eugène Ionesco

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On Culture

«No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive.»

Mahatma Gandhi

In a recent Council of Europe Publication, culture has been described as “a concept that is often regarded as overexposed, overextended, and possibly over-theorised”,¹ and this is clearly not the space to add another element to the cacophonous discourse on culture.

Yet, when the Council of Europe defines intercultural dialogue for the purpose of their consultation process on the upcoming “White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue” as:

«an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures that leads to a deeper understanding of the other’s world perception»,²

the underlying concept of culture in this particular context clearly cannot be completely ignored.

On page 6 of above-mentioned consultation paper it is argued that

«in this definition, (...) culture includes everything relating to ways of life, customs, beliefs and other things that have been passed on to us for generations, as well as the various forms of artistic creations.»

What this specification of the above definition fails to express is the distinct relation between conceptual understandings of culture on the one hand and understandings of cultural realities on the other. Wolfgang Welsch observes this in discussing ‘transculturality’:

«If one tells us that culture is to be a homogeneity event, then we practice the required *coercions and exclusions*. [...] Whereas if one tells us or subsequent generations that culture ought to incorporate the foreign [...] then *corresponding feasts of integration* will belong to the real structure of our culture.»³

¹ Titley, Gavan (2004): Resituating Culture. Council of Europe, Strasbourg.

² Council of Europe (2007): Preparing the ‘White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue’ of the Council of Europe.

³ Welsch, Wolfgang (1999): Transculturality: the puzzling forms of cultures today. In: Featherstone and Lash (eds): Space of Culture. Sage, London.

Or as Mark Smith puts it, culture is

«at one and the same time **a mark of distinction and of the assumptions upon which such distinctions are forged.**»⁴

Culture is, in other words, not only part of our identity, but also part of our problem. It remains the primary source of our identity, and the primary source of our marginalisation of others which it constantly reproduces and reaffirms. The notion of culture can therefore not only be considered as 'our different ways of life', but also has to entail the varying and often biased modes of framing and assessing these ways of living.

Gavan Titley describes this necessity in another way by saying that

«culture may be used to describe 'ways of life' and life practices, collectivities based on location, nation, history, lifestyle and ethnicity, systems and webs of representation and meaning, and realms of artistic value and heritage. [...] However, **culture as a space of contestation involves the tendency to prefer and embed some meanings over others**, and these preferences involve the interaction of power and meaning. [...] Culture is an operative concept that is often naturalised as a descriptive one.»⁵

Consequently, **culture needs to be resituated** in the sense that its diffuseness has to be accepted and must lead to a constant historicisation and contextualisation, also and especially in the current European discourse on intercultural dialogue. Without doing so, the notion becomes not only meaningless but also dangerously instrumental in defending exclusion and concealing racism – an experience participants at the 'Forum on Intercultural Dialogue' have encountered numerous times at local, regional, national and international level.

⁴ Smith, Mark J. (2001): Culture. Reinventing the Social Sciences. Open University Press, Buckingham.

⁵ Titley, Gavan (2004): Resituating Culture. Council of Europe, Strasbourg.

On Dialogue

«In skilful discussion, you make a choice;
in a dialogue, you discover the nature of choice.»

*William Isaacs*⁶

Currently, dialogue is most commonly understood as a conversation between at least two people. For the purpose of an informed political discourse on intercultural dialogue as an approach in policy and a methodology in education, it might be useful to extend this basic understanding by looking at a few different models and ideas of academics and practitioners.

While it has certainly been beyond the scope of the 'Forum on Intercultural Dialogue' and this document to discuss these approaches in great detail, they have a place and value in situating the currently held discussions on the relevance, function and approach of intercultural dialogue in larger contexts.

Going back to the Greek origins of the word "diá" and "logos" – meaning 'through' and 'word' or 'meaning of the word' – David Bohm has come to consider dialogue as "meaning flowing among, through and between us." In his influential paper "On Dialogue", written with Donald Factor and Peter Garret in 1991, he suggests that dialogue is a way to explore "the roots of the many crises that face humanity today". In Bohm's opinion, dialogue is "exploratory" by which he means that no rules can be fixed for processes of dialogue; its essence is learning which must be based on exploration, a process that defies limitation and restriction.

Bohm underlines that dialogue calls for participants to suspend assumptions and consider other positions, that dialogue needs time and can't be rushed and, very importantly, that dialogue is "essentially a conversation between equals". Power relations need to be transparent, and power disparities need to be adjusted. Or in Bohm's own words: "Hierarchy has no place in dialogue." Despite his refusal to further detail any other rules for dialogue, Bohm indicates what dialogue is not. In his opinion, dialogue is neither discussion nor debate; it is not a technique for problem solving or conflict resolution nor a replacement of discussion salons; it is neither advocacy nor consultation or negotiation.⁷

⁶ In: Senge, Peter (1994): *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*. Currency Doubleday, New York.

⁷ Bohm, David (1991): *On Dialogue*. Reprinted in 2004 by Routledge, New York.

Paula Allman has made the distinction between dialogue, which she considers to be “a form of action aimed at transformation” and discussion more explicit in 1987 by arguing that “discussion focuses primarily on allowing each person to express or communicate and thus clarify in their own minds what they think. By contrast, dialogue involves an exploration of *why* we think what we do and how this thinking has arisen historically.”⁸

Hans-Georg Gadamer has described conversation as a way of coming to a dialogic structure of understanding. In 1979, he described conversation as “a process of two people understanding each other”. He argues that in processes of interaction, we challenge and broaden our “horizons of understanding” by encounters with our own prejudices and the prejudices of others. By trying to understand the standpoint of others through conversations that are leading us – rather than us leading the conversations – we experience what Gadamer calls a “fusion of horizons”.⁹

In 1947, Martin Buber set apart three different kinds of dialogue. According to him, there is genuine dialogue “where each of the participants really has in mind the others” and in which listening, “attentive silence” and understanding play an important role. There is secondly technical dialogue, which is “prompted solely by the need of objective understanding”. The third form of dialogue he describes is monologue disguised as dialogue, in which two persons speak each with themselves. It is only through genuine dialogue that people can experience the “dual sensation” of experiencing themselves and simultaneously experiencing others.¹⁰

Much further back goes the work of Plato, student of Socrates and teacher of Aristotle. Plato presented much of his thinking in the form of dialogues between people. This dialogical (also: dialectical) method of jointly exploring issues emphasises collective conversations, as opposed to individual. “It is through the to and fro of argument that understanding grows.”¹¹

In more recent times, Jürgen Habermas explored dialogue and conversations. When describing the ‘ideal speech situation’ in 1981, he looked at how power conditions dialogue and how great inequalities in power could be dealt with; a problem many theories had so far not fully addressed. Habermas in essence argues that dialogue does not require egalitarian relationships, but that the dialogue must not be constrained by differences in role or status and that all participants must have equal opportunity to participate.¹²

⁸ Allman, Paula (1987): Paulo Freire’s Education approach: a struggle for meaning. In: Allen, Garth et al (1988): Community Education: An Agenda for Reform. Open University Press, Milton Keynes.

⁹ Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1979): Truth and Method. Sheed and Ward, London.

¹⁰ Buber, Martin (1947): Between Man and Man. Republished in 2002 by Routledge, New York.

¹¹ Smith, Mark (1997, 2005): Plato. Encyclopaedia of informal education at <http://www.infed.org>.

¹² Habermas, Jürgen (1984): The Theory of Communicative Action. Polity Press, Cambridge.

It was mainly Paulo Freire who has taken the concept of dialogue into education. Dialogue, in his thinking, is an essential part of human nature, a process of discovery that we absolutely need. He thinks of the moment of dialogue as the moment of transformation. Freire categorised formal education as vertical dialogue or “banking pedagogy” where one person only listens and the other drops off knowledge. He argues for “horizontal dialogue” and for breaking up the division between those who know and those who don’t and claims that dialogical relations are otherwise not possible. In such forms of dialogue, Freire writes, “arguments based on ‘authority’ are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be *on the side of* freedom, not against it. Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world.”¹³

It is, of course, with purpose that this section finishes with Freire’s thinking – as he poses a question essential for the discourse on intercultural dialogue that was also explored at the ‘Forum on Intercultural Dialogue’. Is it the case, as Freire suggests, that **dialogue cannot occur between those who have been denied the right to speak, and those who deny the right?**¹⁴

¹³ Freire, Paulo (1972): *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Penguin, Harmondsworth. Freire, Paulo and Shor, Ira (1987): *A Pedagogy for Liberation. Dialogues on transforming education*. Greenwood Press, Westport.

¹⁴ Freire, Paulo (1972): *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Penguin, Harmondsworth.

On Intercultural Dialogue

«Dialogues between cultures and peoples
has never been needed more urgently than it is today.»
Romano Prodi

In the experience of the participants at the 'Forum on Intercultural Dialogue', Romano Prodi's claim is certainly true. Interestingly, participants observed that while there are plenty of spaces, places, structures and methods for intercultural dialogue on community level, in larger contexts and discussions one would overwhelmingly often meet stereotypical simplification, prejudiced mystification and monocultural confrontation disguised as dialogue.

In other words: There seems to be a growing gap between youth and social work at community level on the one hand, and politics and mainstream media on the other hand. This gap is seen to be nurtured with clear intentions and agendas, leading to the criminalisation of minorities and the inducement of fears and thus revealing the connection with power, influence and control.

This discussion at the forum was just one of many to exemplify the unique approach of the event, which brought together activists from international non-governmental organisations with practitioners from local level grassroots associations to discuss intercultural dialogue in what everyone considers to have been an extremely fruitful and inspiring exchange of ideas and experience. Undoubtedly, the divorce between local intercultural dialogue practice and the major societal discourse has been, if experienced from somewhat different ends, a uniting frustration of practitioners and activists alike.

In bringing these two sides together, the 'Forum on Intercultural Dialogue' has provided the rare occasion to combine two often disparate levels of action and pull together an exceptional richness of experience on intercultural dialogue. Together, participants explored how intercultural dialogue needs to be conditioned to be successful. And while it was not the purpose of the forum to come to a unanimous agreement on one set of conditions for community work on intercultural dialogue, a number of elements were highlighted throughout the event¹⁵:

- Intercultural dialogue needs to have a purpose. To many participants, an adequate aim of intercultural dialogue would be a society that is a living model of intercultural co-operation

¹⁵ in no specific order or hierarchy.

and co-production rather than multicultural co-existence. Thus, intercultural dialogue is not an end in itself.

- Intercultural dialogue calls for clear limits. If we are for human rights, participation and diversity – what is it that we are actually against? We argue this standpoint in relation to racism in more detail later on, but in general it was felt that limits need to be clearly drawn, even if it is politically not opportune.
- Intercultural dialogue is about people, about human beings. It therefore needs to start from people's needs and provide space for their genuine and authentic participation.
- Intercultural dialogue needs a framework based on human rights and the shared assumption that cultures enjoy equal dignity and individuals equal rights.
- Intercultural dialogue is a learning process requiring intellectual and physical mobility from people and time, spaces and resources to accommodate these learning processes.
- Intercultural dialogue is not the exclusive responsibility of the state or civil society. It requires co-operation between the two and calls for the co-creation of something new that is commonly shared.
- Based on the clarity of purpose and the principles of co-production identified above, intercultural dialogue needs to be categorically open-ended.
- Intercultural dialogue necessitates people to be aware of their own assumptions. Furthermore, they need to be able to (or enabled to) put these assumptions aside and suspend judgement.
- Intercultural dialogue is a process with a centre, not sides. It is neither a consultation process nor a discussion, negotiation or media debate. All of these things can be an element of intercultural dialogue at different times, but ultimately it is much more than the sum of its parts.
- Intercultural dialogue requires a deconstruction and reconstruction of power and power relations. This means that, for at least the purpose and duration of the dialogue, a balance needs to be negotiated between those with more power and those with less.

- Intercultural dialogue is not a one-way street. Change needs a balance and cannot be imposed on one dialogue partner. Change should be seen as an enrichment, and development seen as improvement.
- Intercultural dialogue should happen in places that mean something to the people involved; it must be a local endeavour and can only be constructed where people live and work. Yet, dialogues should be connected globally as well.
- Intercultural dialogue should not try to find and impose answers. Rather, it should concentrate on identifying powerful and informed questions; questions that are not pregnant with assumptions and loaded with prejudice; questions that do not seek agreement but offer engagement.
- Intercultural dialogue should be true to its words. It cannot only consist of talking, even if the term might suggest so. Talk needs to turn into action; you need to 'walk the talk' as they say. Likewise, action needs to be reflected upon.
- Intercultural dialogue should be informed by research and should inform policy. This triangular relationship suggests that intercultural dialogue can never happen in a small, secluded corner but essentially is a political process with far-reaching implications.

Beyond these elements of intercultural dialogue as experienced by the participants of the forum in their contexts and realities, a number of questions remained open – questions that participants brought with them to the forum, questions which were shaped by workshops, exchanges, discussions and in that way discovered at the forum. In the spirit of Jostein Gaarder, who said that

«an answer is always the part of the road that is behind you; **only questions point to the future.**»

these questions are presented here and meant as a contribution to the discussion on intercultural dialogue which is only just beginning:

Is dialogue enough to evolve from multi-cultural co-existence to intercultural co-production?

Are discrimination and racism only a question of culture? Would such a claim not delude questions of power, power relations and structural issues?

Does the current practice of intercultural learning support such delusion? Are we the fog of racism concealed by nicely speaking of culture?

Is the use of the notion 'intercultural dialogue' and in particular the connotations of the concepts of 'culture' so problematic that one should disengage and withdraw from this dialogue altogether?

How could we reclaim the terms – if at all?

What can we do to bridge the gap between community work and mainstream public discourses on intercultural dialogue?

How can we bring together conceptual, educational, political discourses and controversies on intercultural dialogue – on all levels; practice, policy, media and academia?

How can the imminent culturalisation of minorities be broken up – also in our own educational, political and/or scientific work?

How is it possible to engage in intercultural dialogue and avoid cultural relativism? Is it possible at all?

What are the limits of local level intercultural dialogue, and what are the limits of a European approach? How can local and international levels be brought together best, i.e. in complementary and informing ways?

«The important thing is not to stop questioning.

Curiosity has its own reasons for existing.»

Albert Einstein

On Anti-Racism

«There comes a time when silence is betrayal.»

Dr Martin Luther King Jr

The popularity and media attention received by intercultural dialogue has highlighted a “positivistic” tendency in attitudes towards the usefulness of certain approaches to intercultural relations. In other words, approaches to dialogue articulated positively, or “for something”, are considered more useful and more effective than those articulated “against something”.

Anti-Racism, long the chosen approach of civil society to dealing with the problems of relations between different communities and cultural groups in multicultural societies, seems to have lost its mystique and is today often accused of being over dramatic, exaggerated or hysterical. The recently revived European Campaign “All Different – All Equal” of the Council of Europe is a case in point. Whereas in 1995, the highest value was accorded to combating Racism, Xenophobia, anti-Semitism and Intolerance, and anti-Racist and anti-Fascist activists were welcomed to Strasbourg, the 2006-2007 edition claims to be “for” diversity, participation and human rights.

Against this backdrop, the anti-Racism movement is faced with the challenge of redefining its relevance. If intercultural dialogue places such value on being “for” something, how can a movement that is against something contribute?

The discussion at the ‘Forum on Intercultural Dialogue’ progressed through several stages, addressing the following questions:

- What are the manifestations of Racism that the young people the participants work with face in their daily realities?
- What kind of problems does this cause for the young people concerned? What challenges do those problems post for the youth work the participants do?
- What strategies do the young people and youth workers have for coping with and combating Racism?
- What else could be done and what would be needed in order to do it? What kind of support would local youth work need?
- What is the place of anti-Racism work in intercultural dialogue? What is its specific contribution?

This discussion raised two important points in relation to how anti-Racism can contribute constructively to Intercultural Dialogue.

In the first place, it raised the question of the limits of tolerance. If human rights are not respected, especially the most basic of the physical and emotional integrity of the human being and its dignity, then the limit of tolerance has been reached.

Secondly, Racism is a profoundly violent phenomenon and, therefore, intercultural dialogue cannot just be a matter of “let’s agree to disagree”. Being against something is still a valid approach to certain phenomena, especially Racism. It is absolutely necessary to take a stand and to be clear about that stand.

Racism is wrong and contrary to human rights and it is neither counter productive nor aggressive to be explicit about that.

In the context of any campaign to promote human rights, this position needs to maintain a certain visibility. Likewise, the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue should be crystal clear on that point as it otherwise risks losing its credibility. An adequate text on intercultural dialogue cannot assimilate the concerns expressed by the participants of the ‘Forum on Intercultural Dialogue’ and abstract them to issues of cultures and their problematic relations.

On Intercultural Learning

«Intercultural Learning needs to be reconstructed.»

Lene Mogensen

At the resituating culture seminar organised in the framework of the partnership agreement between the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe and the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission, youth researchers and youth work practitioners voiced the suspicion that

«the necessity to educate about culture may have generated **dogmatic educational practices** grounded in equally static and unreflexive ideas of culture.»¹⁶

The suspected organisation of activities around static notions of culture and the orthodoxies produced by such activities have led to many debates and discussions in the field of non-formal education. Lene Mogensen has criticised a range of simulation exercises around intercultural learning as still

«viewing culture as a thing that can almost be touched instead of what it really is: **a concept that can be defined in indefinite ways.**»¹⁷

In doing so, intercultural learning activities tend to counteract their own aim of developing tolerance of ambiguity in relation to identity and culture. By presenting culture as a monolithic, nonnegotiable and unmediated ‘something’, in practice they fail to distinguish between the ways in which participants think about culture and the ways in which culture is treated in their context by governments, media or society. Ultimately, culture collapses into an arbitrary ‘feel good’ notion and becomes completely depoliticised. Deconstructions of internalised behavioural superiority and investigations how such (essentially racist) behaviour is conditioned by the propagated understanding of ‘culture’ do not take place any longer.

At the same time, many programmes and initiatives seem to advertise intercultural learning with the belief that through increasing the contact between culturally diverse people and raising awareness on cultural difference, tolerance and acceptance can be promoted.

¹⁶ Tittley, Gavan (2004): Resituating culture. Council of Europe, Strasbourg.

¹⁷ Mogensen, Lene (2005): The Derdians. Published on <http://www.nonformality.org>.

But just being aware of cultural differences is not good enough. As Gavan Titley argues in his discussion document for the Council of Europe's Directorate of Youth and Sports entitled "Plastic, Political and Contingent: Culture and Intercultural Learning":

«If intercultural learning is to be rescued from its bloatedness, training approaches need to develop **critical literacy** with regard to the conceptual, educational and political discourses that culture is implicated in.»¹⁸

The paper suggests a range of questions to be used to assess the intercultural approach of an educational activity such as a training session:

«In terms of the guiding idea of culture at work, key questions should include:

What kind of conditioning is attributed to the idea of culture being employed? How does this conditioning relate to questions of agency? How is culture conceptualised in relation to other intersectional elements of identity, such as gender, class, religion, politics, sexuality, location, and biography? What is the hidden prefix of the term when spoken (e.g. national, ethnic, regional)? How does one learn culture? How does one belong to a culture? What is the declared\assumed location of culture? How is cultural change explained, if at all? What degree of internal homogeneity is attributed to culture, and does this remain at an abstract level or is it applied to particular contexts? What cultural rights and legitimacies are explored? What is the intellectual and political history of the idea of culture being employed, and how is it related to the context in which it is deployed?

How cultural encounters or relationships are imagined depends heavily on the theory of culture being deployed:

In what ways are the groups or cultures in this relationship imagined and delineated? How and by whom is cultural membership attributed? How is the context of encounter considered, both in the methodology employed, and the actual context in which the educational activity takes place? What are the assumed and desired consequences of cultural encounter? Does cultural exchange take place, and if so how and why?

¹⁸ Titley, Gavan (2005): Plastic, Political and Contingent: Culture and Intercultural Learning in DYS Activities. Discussion document based on the evaluation of the LTTC Intercultural Learning and recent research activities. Council of Europe, Strasbourg.

In terms of learning, different approaches to intercultural education posit different learning goals, and notions of what should and can be learnt:

How is the individual imagined as a cultural actor? What is the aim of intercultural learning; efficiency, assimilation, self-reflexiveness? What does one learn about culture or cultures? How is intercultural learning linked to other educational foci, such as human rights education and citizenship? How is it treated in relation to society and political economy?»¹⁹

The experience of both team and participants of the 'Forum on Intercultural Dialogue' suggests that **a similar set of questions also could and certainly should inform the educational work on intercultural learning and dialogue** outside the realm of the European Youth Centres.

¹⁹ Titley, Gavan (2005): *Plastic, Political and Contingent*, pp. 35-36.

Forum on Intercultural Dialogue

Organised by the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe in co-operation with the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe in partnership with the Youth Express Network and with the support of the Council of Europe

A contribution to the All Different, All Equal Campaign

Strasbourg, 22-26 November 2006

Introduction

The Liaison Committee of the INGO-Conference and the Advisory Council on Youth are the two major non-governmental bodies of the Council of Europe. As such, they have significant experience of implementing projects and working with people at local, national, regional and international levels. They have now come to join forces on an important topic: Intercultural Dialogue.

Intercultural Dialogue is about positive approaches to living together. It is also about the perceived differences that influence the communicative processes underway in society. Equality in this communication is very important as it ensures that people can talk to each other on the same level. As inequality is often present in contexts where people with different cultural backgrounds and affiliations meet, it has to be exposed and brought to the awareness of those who engage in intercultural dialogue.

Intercultural Dialogue is a dream, an attempt to change the way societies function for the better. It has often been quoted as a potential cure for the problems that are seen as deriving from diversity. This positioning makes intercultural dialogue a highly normative undertaking. It has political implications. Talking to each other, understanding each other, overcoming problems that are rooted in the multitude of differences that people demonstrate is valued and wanted. Nevertheless, social inequality and racism are obstacles that have to be fought in order to establish a substantial basis for intercultural dialogue.

Complex identities, however, are often not taken fully into account when ascribing the label 'diverse' to different partners in dialogues. Here the question of what culture actually is and what value it has as an explanatory category enters the discussion. Certainly nationality or ethnic origin cannot describe any person in their full complexity. How deep can and should one go to identify one's own cultural identity or to be able to really say that dialogue is in fact intercultural?

Intercultural dialogue also takes place inside specific communities, not only between communities. It is both an individual and a collective process. When in an Intercultural Dialogue people are asked to speak for a community, the aspect of representativity becomes relevant. Who is speaking for whom? Who is allowed to speak for whom? Depending on who is speaking, the impact of what is said differs.

The question of how local organisations, international organisations and institutions can work together to make an Intercultural Dialogue work for and serve the wider community is therefore central to this initiative. Further, the Council of Europe is currently working on developing a policy on Intercultural Dialogue. The ideas and discussions that are planned to take place in this forum will contribute to the creation of the first draft of this document, among other forms of consultation that the Council of Europe will initiate with several institutional actors. This represents an opportunity for civil society actors to provide policy makers with sound evidence, experience and ideas from the grass-roots level, and to connect the Council of Europe with local civil society partners.

Aim

The aim of the 'Forum on Intercultural Dialogue' was to stimulate local actors to engage in intercultural dialogue at local level and influence European practice and policy.

Objectives

- To provide the opportunity for participants to experience a process of intercultural dialogue and to plan how to transfer that to their own realities.
- To provide the participants with an engaging forum to establish contacts, form partnerships and networks and share good practices, which they can use as a resource for their future work in intercultural dialogue.
- To contribute to the elaboration of a white paper of the Council of Europe on intercultural dialogue.
- To help develop the relations between the Council of Europe and the local environment.

Preparatory Team

The forum was implemented by an intercultural, inter-generational and inter-institutional team of professionals and volunteers from civil society:

- Brigitte Ludmann, Strasbourg/France: President of the Youth Express Network
- Yael Ohana, Bratislava/Slovakia: Training consultant and editor
- Mark Taylor, Brussels/Belgium: Freelance trainer, consultant and author
- Gavan Titley, Maynooth/Ireland: Lecturer in Media, Trainer
- Lionel Schreiber, Brussels/Belgium: Advisory Council on Youth – Council of Europe
- Bastian Küntzel, Chemnitz/Germany: INGO-Conference – Council of Europe
- Andreas Karsten, Berlin/Germany: Freelance trainer, consultant and editor

Profile of participants

The forum brought together 30 participants from local and international non-governmental organisations. Participants were representatives of those NGOs, working mainly with young people, and with active experience in intercultural dialogue-related issues at local level. Among other things they had experiences in working with minority and religious communities, social exclusion, discrimination and issues of racism. They were and remain interested in undertaking intercultural dialogue activities after the event. Some participants are actively engaged at local and national levels in the European Youth-Campaign 'All Different, All Equal' currently being prepared by the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe.

Language

The forum was conducted in French and English.

Date and Venue

The forum took place from 22 to 26 November 2006 in the European Youth Centre, Strasbourg.

Methodology

The team had an interactive and non-formal approach to organising this forum. However, there were collective moments in plenary with adequate time devoted to inputs as well. Participants were encouraged to engage in lively discussions and sharing their experiences with each other.