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# CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND THE ARTS

*Language and Meanings*

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Office of the Minister for Integration  
*Óifig an Aire Lánpháirtíochta*

# Cultural Diversity and the Arts

Language and Meanings

## CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND THE ARTS

*Cultural Diversity and the Arts – Language and Meanings* is an edited version of Chapter Four of *Cultural Diversity and the Arts*, a section of the research report commissioned by the Arts Council in partnership with the Office of the Minister for Integration / National Action Plan against Racism (NPAR). The report was co-ordinated by Create and authored by Dr. Daniel Jewesbury, Jagtar Singh (Change Institute) and Sarah Tuck (Create).

The pamphlet is intended as a resource for the arts sector and the diverse publics with which it works or wishes to work.

More generally it aims to inform and enrich public discourse about culturally diverse interaction, collaboration and experimentation, based on shared understandings of relevant terms.

The publication of the pamphlet by the Arts Council is also intended to facilitate ongoing dialogue with the wide range of individuals and organisations who took part in the initial research process.

## **A note from the Arts Council**

In *Partnership for the Arts: Arts Council Goals (2006 – 2010)* the Arts Council named 'diversity' as a core value that would shape its work over the lifetime of the strategy. In this context, 'diversity' included diversity of arts practice; the range of ways in which artists make work; the range of ways in which people experience the arts; and the increasing cultural diversity of our society.

In addressing this last aspect of diversity, the Arts Council and the Office of the Minister for Integration / National Action Plan against Racism (NPAR) entered into partnership in 2007 in order to carry out a significant research project *Cultural Diversity and the Arts*. The purpose of this research was to inform the development of a policy and action plan through which the Arts Council would support culturally diverse practice into the future.

The Arts Council engaged Create - the national development agency for collaborative arts - to manage the extensive research and consultation phases, which combined national and international desk research, consultation, analysis, and delivery of a report and recommendations. The research process took place throughout 2008 and the final report was submitted to the Arts Council in 2009.

The Arts Council is currently considering the findings of the report and intends to develop a policy and strategy before the end of 2010.

In the meantime, the Arts Council is undertaking three strategic initiatives in order to support the arts sector to increase its competence and build its capacity for culturally diverse work. The publication of this section of the report as a resource tool is the first of these initiatives.

The other two Arts Council initiatives in the area of Cultural Diversity are:

- The introduction of a cultural diversity strand to the Local Partnership Scheme
- The piloting of a cultural diversity audit on selected Arts Council schemes

Finally, this pamphlet is designed to be a practical resource for the sector. Consequently, the Arts Council would welcome feedback on your experience in using the publication and your suggestions about further resources that might assist you in planning culturally diverse arts initiatives.

## **CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND THE ARTS - LANGUAGE AND MEANINGS**

Many terms and concepts central to the consideration of cultural diversity and the arts are still the subject of confusion and misunderstanding. Terms can be used without sufficient clarity or precision, and meanings are often assumed to be clear when they are in fact ambiguous. This has implications for those tasked with the development, implementation and communication of cultural diversity policies in the arts at local, regional and national level.

For these reasons, a consideration of the most relevant terms and concepts is offered here. As well as offering a range of definitions and clarifications, this section describes some areas of contention expressed by individuals who work in the arts in Ireland and who took part in the Arts Council research into *Cultural Diversity and the Arts*, which was coordinated by Create.

Understanding these areas of contention is important to understanding the various barriers that exist to participation in the arts. The creation of conditions for genuine culturally diverse arts practice involves the application of methods and approaches in more than a merely aspirational manner.

The definitions that follow offer not only the meanings of relevant terms but also their usages, contexts and application in Ireland today.

### Arts

The *Arts Act 2003* defines the arts as: 'any creative or interpretative expression (whether traditional or contemporary) in whatever form, and includes, in particular, visual arts, theatre, literature, music, dance, opera, film, circus and architecture, and includes any medium when used for those purposes.'<sup>1</sup>

### Culture

The terms 'culture' and 'cultural' are used to refer to the customs, attitudes, experiences and/or traditions that may be shared (or disputed) by groups of people, through belonging to particular national or ethnic groups. This is the sense that is indicated in the term 'cultural diversity'. It is not assumed that groups are defined by their culture, but that cultures are dynamic and are produced by groups, often in reference to other groups and cultures.

### Cultural Diversity

The term 'cultural diversity' is commonly used in two slightly different contexts. It is sometimes used to refer to the idea that the cultural customs and ways of life of particular groups around the world are threatened by the spread of a globalised 'world culture'. Accordingly, in this context, cultural diversity is often spoken of as something requiring preservation or protection.

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<sup>1</sup> Arts Act 2003, Acts of the Oireachtas (Dublin: Stationery Office).



It is also used to refer to the range of different cultures that are to be found in a given region or state, the manner in which these cultures co-exist, and the basis of that co existence.

Both of these concepts are relevant in the Irish context. The second is clearly the sense which is most often understood by those working directly with ethnic minority communities within Ireland (including Travellers), and has been the primary focus of this research. The first, however, allows for an understanding of the importance of the Irish language as simultaneously a minority language and one of the official languages of the State.

In the preamble to the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura states that '[t]he Universal Declaration makes it clear that each individual must acknowledge not only otherness in all its forms but also the plurality of his or her own identity, within societies that are themselves plural. Only in this way can cultural diversity be preserved as an adaptive process and as a capacity for expression, creation and innovation.'<sup>2</sup>

It is important to understand the conception of 'plurality' as existing *within and between societies*, as well as *within and between individuals in societies*, since it has too often been

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<sup>2</sup> UNESCO (2002) Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (Paris: UNESCO).

the case that this conception is not applied when discussing culturally diverse arts practice in Ireland.

Ireland has recently become a much more diverse nation, with net migration consistently positive from 1995 up to 2009<sup>3</sup>, against the backdrop of a long history of emigration prior to this. Accordingly, it is sometimes presumed that 'diversity' is a 'new' challenge for a society that was previously homogeneous. This in turn gives rise to an understanding of cultural diversity as something to be negotiated by internally-coherent identity blocs, chief among them being 'the Irish', who are identical in terms of ethnicity, culture and faith.

Whilst cultural diversity may be a recent area for arts policy formation in Ireland, Ireland has always been a diverse nation, with a range of ethnic, cultural and faith-based communities whose presence has been of sufficiently long standing to be considered permanent.

The Arts Council research into *Cultural Diversity and the Arts* (2008-2009) adopted an anti-essentialist approach to cultural or ethnic identity. Essentialism is the belief in the existence of 'irreducible' ethnic or racial characteristics and groups, usually determined biologically. The research took 'Irishness' itself to be a non-racial identity i.e. not presumed to be synonymous with such terms as 'white' or 'Catholic' but rather potentially inclusive of a plurality of diverse, co-existing identities.

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**3** [www.finfacts.ie/irishfinancenews/article\\_1017950.shtml](http://www.finfacts.ie/irishfinancenews/article_1017950.shtml)

Therefore the notion of cultural diversity as something that exists between various stable, essentialised identities was eschewed, in favour of a concept of multiple diversities 'within and between' inhabitants of the State.

This is also the approach of the Office of the Minister for Integration (OMI), which has as one of its policy objectives: 'to promote the development of a tolerant inclusive society in which both newcomers and host society, irrespective of background, can, over time, share and develop a sense of being Irish while respecting the cultures and practices inherent in the emergence of our new multicultural society.'<sup>4</sup>

### Multiculturalism

There is a degree of confusion in Ireland, surrounding the terms 'multiculturalism' and 'interculturalism'. To some extent this reflects an ongoing political and semantic contest over the terms and their supposed implications. This, combined with Ireland's historical lack of official policies relating to multiculturalism, means the terms are sometimes used interchangeably in Ireland.

Multiculturalism is a term grounded in British cultural theory and race relations discourse, and is strongly associated with conflicts within British society.

At the simplest level, it refers to the parallel existence of distinct cultural or ethnic groups within the same nation,

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<sup>4</sup> From OMI website, <http://www.ria.gov.ie/integration>; 2/11/08.

without any exchange or dialogue necessarily taking place, or being encouraged or facilitated between them. In the British context it has been criticised as being primarily concerned with the commodification of minority cultures (and their artefacts) through discourses of 'celebration'. Multiculturalism presupposes that at least more than one population are of sufficient critical mass to form and institutionalise a cultural community, supported by fiscal, legal and administrative mechanisms.

### Interculturalism

Implicit in the notion of interculturalism is a process that enables or encourages interaction between cultures:

*Interculturalism is the development of strategy, policy and practice that promotes interaction, understanding, respect and integration between different cultures and ethnic groups on the basis that cultural diversity is a strength that can enrich society, without glossing over issues such as racism.<sup>5</sup>*

There is a limit to the extent to which these processes can be prescribed in legislation or ensured through the formation of a cultural diversity arts policy. Rather than seeking to 'direct' intercultural dialogue at a state level, policy is required to make (and protect) the space in civil society in which such dialogue can take place.

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<sup>5</sup> Louth County Council (2007) *Louth Anti-Racism and Diversity Plan* (Dundalk: Social Inclusion Unit, Louth County Council), p. 35.

Interculturalist discourse is not based on the assumption that minorities require assimilation into the norms of the cultural majority. The predominant context of intercultural dialogue is the voluntarism and autonomy of non-governmental agencies and minority-led organisations. There is nevertheless great scope, perhaps given the vague, aspirational manner in which interculturalism is sometimes invoked, for simplistic, Eurocentric biases to persist, particularly those steeped in assumptions of naïve universality or even tacit racism. Interculturalism is perhaps best approached in the spirit of the quotation from UNESCO Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura cited in the definition of ‘cultural diversity’ above, as a process not between fixed or static cultures, but between individuals who wish to find opportunities for solidarity in the negotiation of difference, as members of heterogeneous, dynamic broad-based cultural or ethnic groups.

### Intercultural Dialogue

Intercultural Dialogue was identified in the *European Commission’s Agenda for Culture in a Globalising World (2007)* as a means to contribute to the governance of cultural diversity within European nations, trans-nationally across Europe and internationally. Support for this ambition was extended through the designation of 2008 as the Year of Intercultural Dialogue. In preparation, national working groups or bodies were established to co-ordinate government and civil society participation throughout Europe.

In Ireland the former NCCRI (National Consultative Committee on Interculturalism and Racism)<sup>6</sup> was designated National Coordinating Body for the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (EYID) by the Irish Government and the European Commission.

The NCCRI was tasked with the coordination and promotion of events hosted in Ireland in support of intercultural dialogue across all sectors including the arts. The strategy adopted by the NCCRI emphasised the importance of dialogue as one of the key components in building an intercultural society in Ireland, which values diversity, equality and interaction. The strategy also emphasised ideas of creating conditions for a shared sense of place and cohesion. This interpretation which informed the NCCRI strategy for the year was reflected in the various arts projects that were promoted in 2008. These ranged from those based on social cohesion strategies within Ireland to those engaging with the exchange of culturally diverse traditions internationally.

The term intercultural dialogue can be best understood as a process of mutual exchange between cultural groups. Implicit

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**6** The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) was established in 1998 following the European Year against Racism in 1997. It was an independent co-ordinating body conducting research and giving advice and expert guidance to government, the public sector and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the areas of anti-racism and interculturalism. In 2008 the government announced as part of the Budget measures that funding to the NCCRI would cease and some of its functions would be absorbed into the Office of the Minister for Integration.

in the term is the idea that there are pre-existing hierarchies of communication (between the majority population and a minority, for instance) which should be resisted, in favour of more equal engagement, in order that shared understandings can be more easily achieved.

### Discrimination

Discrimination needs to be understood separately from racism. In many ways, it can be understood as an effect of racism. Most simply put, discrimination is unequal treatment of individuals or groups because of some perceived difference. Irish equality legislation forbids discrimination on nine separate grounds including: age; gender; marital status; family status; sexual orientation; religion; disability; race; and the Traveller community.

### Racism

Racism is most often understood as discrimination by an individual on the basis of another individual's skin colour. In Britain, Sir William Macpherson's report into matters arising from the murder of Stephen Lawrence in England in 1993 asserted that this discrimination may be practised, fostered or encouraged, by institutions as well as individuals, even unwittingly, when they fail to take account of the specific and different needs of minority groups.<sup>7</sup> Macpherson called this 'institutional racism'.

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<sup>7</sup> Sir William Macpherson (1999) *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry: Report of an Inquiry* (London: The Stationery Office), <http://www.archive.officialdocuments.co.uk>

Macpherson's slight extension of racism's mode of operation does not describe any more clearly what gives rise to discrimination. Viewed as an effect, arising from a broad range of conditions of disparity (historical, economic, ideological, and political), racism is the expression of all of these conditions. But racism is also the cause, the rationale lying behind policy, law and ideology. Racism can therefore be characterised as cyclical in its nature - as a system of belief and a way of thinking about difference which is then inscribed in the historic legal and social structure of modern states.

Paul Gilroy has described the history of 'racialised thinking', in which essential difference is determined by supposedly biological categories of race.<sup>8</sup> The basis of racism lies in this troubled history of the thinking about the concept of race itself. But this thinking is not static, and nor are the social contexts upon which it is brought to bear. Biological race is nowadays often replaced by other markers of cultural or ethnic difference, which are no less 'irreducible'. In the late 1990s, second and third-generation British Pakistanis found themselves described less as 'Asians' and increasingly as 'Muslims'. It is worth noting that a group that has experienced racism usually has received its identification and definition as a coherent group from the majority group. As Arun Kundnani points out,

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Gilroy (1993) *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (London: Verso) and (2000) *Between Camps* (London: Allen Lane).



*... race is a socially constructed concept that is both wider in its range and more profoundly rooted in the history of the nation than is commonly supposed. Moreover, the restriction of the concept of racism to 'colour' difference has concealed the full range of ways in which racism has operated in Britain, including against Jews, Gypsies and the Irish.<sup>9</sup>*

Relations of power are central to racism. Racism (as effect) is the outward sign of a prior disparity of power between one group and another, and a violent demonstration that this disparity has already been sanctioned, historically, within society and the state. However racism is not merely the expression of this power relationship since the power relationship is itself shaped and defined by racism – that is to say, a belief in fundamental and irreconcilable difference. Racism is not just discrimination, but discrimination legitimised by power.

In an Irish context, the *Louth Anti-Racism and Diversity (ARD) Plan* provides a succinct definition of racism as racialised thinking:

*The starting point lies in belief systems of the existence of different races and membership of a particular 'race', which in turn innately marks a person as inferior or superior.<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>9</sup> Arun Kundnani (2007) *The End of Tolerance: Racism in 21st Century Britain* (London: Pluto Press), p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Louth County Council, op. cit., p. 10.

### Minority Ethnic

There is a particular area of contention surrounding the term ‘minority ethnic’ in Ireland. The Traveller community’s most important campaigning issue is for recognition of their separate ethnic identity, which as yet is not officially recognised by the State. The research into *Cultural Diversity and the Arts* at all times understood the terms ‘minority’ or ‘minority ethnic’ to include Travellers.

*The Louth ARD Plan* contains a particularly useful consideration of the term:

*The preferred use of the term ethnic group relates to the fact that it encourages a focus on the social rather than the biological nature of the differences that exist between groups. In essence, an ethnic group can be defined as one whose members consider themselves, and are also regarded by others, as being socially and/or culturally distinctive.*

*The key point to stress is that all of these possible reasons that contribute toward the distinctiveness of a particular group are social in origin rather than biological.<sup>11</sup>*

### Assimilation

Some states prioritise an assimilatory approach to diversity, believing that minority groups should adopt the ‘values’ and culture of the majority, which they espouse as ‘universal’. An

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<sup>11</sup> Louth County Council, op. cit., p. 14.

example of such an approach can be found in France, where successive governments have argued that the ‘republican’ values of the State must be upheld by all citizens in a common public domain. Cultural particularities – for instance, in terms of language or religion – may only be expressed in the private sphere, and public provision cannot be allocated to such sectional interests. Assimilation is not prioritised as a policy goal in the Irish context.

### Integration

The terms ‘integration’ and ‘assimilation’ need to be approached with caution and clearly distinguished as they are not synonymous, even though they are sometimes used as if they were.

Integration is generally understood to refer to the need to ‘include’ equally all communities in areas of public provision, including access to the arts – as practitioners, audiences and arts managers. It is non-assimilatory in that it seeks to achieve ‘agreed’ policies and values, rather than espousing a central set of ‘universal’ values. As a priority of social policy, however, it may not always be directly applicable to policy formation in the arts. In the course of researching Cultural Diversity and the Arts, cultural critic Rustom Bharucha noted that intercultural arts practices often stress the ‘dissident, transgressive, hybrid and subversive... in distinct contrast to the agenda of integration which connotes a mandatory social

cohesion and act of living together with harmoniously worked out differences’.

### Positive Action

Positive action (also sometimes called positive discrimination, or affirmative action) describes the targeting of policy to particular marginalised or excluded groups. It includes a degree of differential treatment, determined on the basis of the group’s discrimination within society. It is typically used in an effort to redress historic or structural inequalities.

Around the world, different models exist, ranging from India’s ‘reservation’ of places in public universities and technical colleges for individuals from certain castes or tribal groups, to ‘affirmative action’ programmes for minority groups in the USA. Positive action programmes often attract strong criticism, from those who do not recognise the original discrimination, from those who argue for opportunity on purely meritocratic or market-based terms, but also from those who believe that such programmes lower expectations and compromise autonomy amongst minority groups.<sup>12</sup>

In Ireland certain types of positive action could be illegal under equality law. However, programmes providing targeted parallel provision (such as those addressing educational

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**12** A relevant example is Sonia Dyer’s argument against positive action programmes implemented by the Arts Council of England. See Sonia Dyer (2007) *Boxed in: How cultural diversity policies constrict black artists* (London: Manifesto Club).

disadvantage) have been permitted and been successful in recent years.<sup>13</sup>

## Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming is a central priority of government.

*Mainstreaming seeks to ensure that the needs of minority ethnic groups are included in the planning, implementation and review of the major activities undertaken at a policy and organisational level and the proofing of policy and implementation strategies for their impact on minority ethnic groups. Mainstreaming however does not mean that there is one 'mainstream' model of service provision of the 'one size fits all' kind [...] The awareness of different needs and thus different models of service provision becomes central to an organisation's modus operandi.<sup>14</sup>*

The principle of mainstreaming is that all public provision, including the arts, should be equally accessible by all groups. The intention is to reconsider institutional cultures where accessibility may not have been prioritised or may have been

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**13** For example, the New ERA programme at UCD and the Legal Education for All People (LEAP) project run between TCD, Ballymun Law Centre and the Irish Traveller Movement. For an evaluation of such programmes, see Patricia O'Reilly (2008) *The Evolution of University Access Programmes in Ireland* (Dublin: UCD Geary Institute, University College Dublin).

**14** From Philip Watt and Fiona McCaughey, eds. (2006) *Improving Government Service Delivery to Minority Ethnic Groups: Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Scotland* (Belfast: Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland).

approached through short term measures and interventions. Mainstreaming requires a reconsideration of structures, services and programmes where accessibility is planned from the outset and is embedded in the institutional/organisational ethos and is not overly dependent on the vision of the executive director of the organisation.





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