



# MCP Broker Final Public Conference

## Moderators Conclusions

Reflections on the MCP Broker projects final conference at Hangar in Barcelona on June 30 – July 2, 2015. A conference on the learning and experiences coming out of the project phase and the different ways the partners have worked with benchmarking diversity management in cultural institutions.



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## Moderators Conclusions

### *Getting Started*

From the perspective of moderation, the setting, set design and the overall dramaturgy of the program defined a very important part of the conference. The former industrial site of HANGAR and its rough interior provided a perfect frame for the scenography where a scenic lounge setting with a 'living room' atmosphere was the centre of attention for a half-moon of chairs, designed to create a maximum of participation and inclusion of the 'audience' – the true experts, the project participators from Austria, Sweden, Belgium, Italy and Spain. It proved to be a very good idea to set the scene for an inclusive dialogue and the design made it even easier for me as the moderator to help facilitate a multi voiced dialogue and debate.

After the formal routines of welcoming participants, experts, and placing everyone in place and delivering the introduction to the program, its highlights and contents, the final conference took off with two formal video regards to the conference from the European Union. [Names and titles, please] Remarkably enough they both emphasised the importance of arts and culture for social change and a more cohesive society. In doing that they made a perfectly curved pass to Mercedes Giovinazzo, the director of hosting organisation InterArts in Barcelona.

### *MCP Broker – The story*

Sitting in the sofa with me, Mercedes reflected on the process, the partnership, the outcomes and the friction coming out of an initiative like the MCP Broker project. From the initial framework of the project and the willingness to engage with the realities of cultural institutions in the participating five countries in terms of the assumptions of the Brokering Migrants' Cultural Participation project, as it was called in the beginning. Despite the national differences in the composition of the cultural sector, the scope of national cultural politics and funding structures etc. Mercedes underlined the importance of the participating institutions aiming

## *Brokering exchange of knowledge*



*“A project like this really underlines the necessity of transnational exchange of knowledge”*

*“We have learnt more from this project in terms of how we work, than I thought possible from the beginning”*

*“Just by raising awareness on the topic of diversity outreach and inclusive strategies, we have undergone a change of practice in my institution – or at least a much broader focus”*

*“This project might just be the game changer in the way we work with these issues”*

*Comments from  
participants in the  
project.*

at parameters such as transition, change, interaction and inclusive approaches in pinning the keywords for the project. All leading to an overall process understanding, where the actual needs of the arts and culture sector to understand and interact with new citizens was brought to the front of project attention and more structural EU approaches in terms of definitions became less important. An example being that the term 'migrants' in an institutional practice across Europe is not reduced to only third country nationals, in the way e.g. the European Integration Fund defines them. All along the project the focus had to deal with the realities of the institutions in order to be relevant. Many institutions are caught in a friction between the 'logos' and the demands of public policies and those of their branch and their respective missions. On top of that a great number of other issues of course influence the institutional modus operandi: the effect of the financial crises, decreasing resources, a shift of the domestic political focus and priorities, increasing demands for reaching out for more – and new – audiences, lack of knowledge / staff competencies etc.

However difficult the situation looks for quite many of the participating institutions, the real benefit of being part of the project turned out to be exactly that; participating in it! Exchanging knowledge, experiences, having the opportunity to discuss the issues and tools introduced with colleagues, practice exchange during the project lifetime and not least being able to bring the institution into a 'state of mind' where professional hesitation, investigation and reflection was given space and thus moving the institution towards a more reflective approach on its inclusive practice. That turned out to be the true benefit of the MCP Broker project, something that was immediately reflected in comments and reflections from the room in the following lively discussion.

#### *Making the benchmarking tool matter*

Introducing the benchmarking tool, Ida Burén from Intercult in Stockholm was accompanied in the sofa by Cristina Da Milano and Simona Bodo from ECCOM in Rome. They gave their overall reflections on how the developed benchmarking tool functioned and reflected the needs of the institutions using it. Cristina Da Milano introduced a definition of it and underpinned some of the challenges met in the usage of the tool. The tool and its use need to be adjusted with further parameters related to the everyday reality of the culture institutions in order to become truly relevant for the cultural institutions at large as a strategic tool for change and increased participation. A point supported by the cases presented by both Ida Burén and Simona Bodo.

Interestingly enough the following discussion showed, that even though there are some relatively evident lacks in the tool as it is, it still has worked quite well as a process facilitation initiator creating awareness on standards, way of thinking, institutional practices, 'blind spots', new approaches etc. And in the form adjusted and refined by Intercult, the tool has found a form that reflects and connects to the DNA of most cultural organisations. Both Ida Burén and Simona Bodo pointed out, that the more aware the institutions got, the more relevant the tools became. In the beginning most institutions had a low score according to the benchmarking tool, even though the institutions would consider themselves to be relatively advanced in their thinking on diversity issues. But towards the end of the project that pattern changes and there were a more coherent

balance between the self-image of the institutions and their actual performance according to the benchmarks.

#### *Diversity management – or how to navigate in a 'sea' of diverse demands*

After a both highly enjoyable and lively network session the first day ended with a plenum and panel debate on diversity management in cultural institutions - a review on the project and a dialogue with a specific cross Mediterranean approach. Again the institutions difficulty to navigate between their own missions and artistic agendas, the representational politics and supportive structures and how to deal with and ensure a higher diverse presence from their potential users formed a backdrop for the conversation. Ida Burén and Cristina Da Milano was accompanied by Luca Bergamo from Culture Action Europe, Michael Wimmer from Educult and Antonio Gucciardo from InterArts in the formation of a highly reflective dialogue on the learning from the project, the process and not least an interesting tour of the status of diversity management in the five countries. Both Michael Wimmer and Luca Bergamo added some more nuances to the cultural landscape in terms of how institutions could meet and deal with these challenges in their programming practice, recruitment policies, choice of partners and transversal collaboration with other sectors, just to mention some of the points given. The repetitiveness of the cultural institutions in their everyday administrative practice seems to be one major obstacle that has to be addressed both on a national level as well as from the stakeholders as a whole.

#### *Trans-Mediterranean reflections*

The MCP Broker project managers was then joined by Abdallah Soliman from Gudran in Alexandria in Egypt and Karim Dakroub from Khayal in Beirut for a trans-Mediterranean debate on how issues of migration, identity making and not least culture as an integrational factor for newcomers. Not surprisingly did the present situation in the Middle East influence the last part of the debate. Both Abdallah Soliman and Karim Dakroub expressed the hope that European institutions and cultural organisations would seek for a more nuanced picture and understanding of the complex cultural identities and patterns on the other side of the Mediterranean sea, both to the benefit of cultural exchange and possible collaboration between partners on both sides but also as way into the European reality for the presumably thousands and thousands of people wanting to flee the animosities and horrors taking place in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere in the region, a point made far more visible post the MCP Broker conference the summer and early autumn, where up to one million refugees have sought shelter in Europe. The panel agreed in Europe having to confront other issues than merely religion and politics in order to frame a more cohesive and inclusive dialogue with cultural operators and individuals from the Maghreb and Middle East. A point much supported from the hall, by e.g. Christine Merkel from the German Unesco Committee, who also emphasised the need of a more respectful and curious approach from Europe in terms of understanding who we are 'talking' with and the cultural backdrop they have.

#### *Next step: Gothenburg*

The second day was designed around a Learning Partnership activity addressing the challenges ahead framed as three different workshop settings each with a very clear focus on the challenges

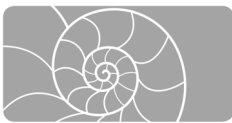
lying ahead. Again the notion of a changed approach to how these issues are being addressed was highlighted, as was the understanding of how useful tools like the MCP Broker benchmarking tool can be for that process. No doubt the previous intense day's debate with colleagues and experts from all the participating countries helped create an atmosphere of reflection, progressive investigation and curiosity on the different experiences this crowd of highly experienced professionals brought to the table. The presentations and discussions made Luca Bergamo from Culture Action Europe together with the other project managers decide for a possible follow up on the conference through the formation of a working group, which shall have it's first meeting during Culture Action Europes annual conference on October 15 – 17, this year in Gothenburg. It shall be interesting to see how a complex and well-anchored initiative like MCP Broker can spread in new ways into the culture sectors many diverse levels.

*Final remark*

The MCP Broker Conference was, in my very subjective opinion, a study in how well it is possible to design, frame and execute a conference in a way, which allows a maximum of participants and speakers to be heard and contribute to the discussions and debates. Obviously the fact that almost everybody in the room had been working with or engaged in MCP Broker processes in their home countries helped provide the notion of being invited to an extended family gathering, where the level of interaction was way above average. I have the highest respect for the calm, 'loungy' and well-executed professionalism the organisers from InterArts showed before, during and after this conference. It was simply a great pleasure and it made my job so much easier.

Niels Righolt

October 14, 2015



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