Navigating the journey from conflict to interculturalism:
The Arts in Northern Ireland

Report on the 6th Intercultural Practice Exchange
14th – 16th November 2012, Belfast, UK

This event was organised by Platform for Intercultural Europe in collaboration with Arts Council of Northern Ireland
This report was written by Dr Katy Radford, Institute for Conflict Research, Belfast on behalf of the Platform for Intercultural Europe

www.conflictresearch.org.uk

Editor: Sabine Frank, Platform for Intercultural Europe

Approval: Nick Livingston, Arts Council of Northern Ireland

Published January 2013

© Copyright Platform for Intercultural Europe

www.intercultural-europe.org

You are free to copy, distribute and cite this report under the condition that you attribute it to Platform for Intercultural Europe.

Photo credits: Platform for Intercultural Europe, Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Brendan Jackson, Geoff Broadway, Rani Kasapi, Paul Kane, Oh Yeah Music Centre

The Platform for Intercultural Europe acknowledges the support of the European Cultural Foundation
CONTENTS

OVERVIEW P.5
Background to the Platform for Intercultural Europe
Arts and Interculturalism in Northern Ireland

DAY ONE P.6
Welcome Reception - Address by Bob Collins, Chair, Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI)

DAY TWO P.7
THE ROLE OF THE ARTS IN POST CONFLICT NORTHERN IRELAND
An exploration of the social, economic and political impact of the Arts

Welcome – Sabine Frank, Secretary General, Platform for Intercultural Europe and Roisín McDonough, Chief Executive, Arts Council of Northern Ireland P.7

Presentation – 14 Years after the Good Friday Agreement: Remaining Challenges for Peace and Cohesion P.9
- Paul Nolan, Research Director, Community Relations Council (CRC)
  Northern Ireland Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report, Number One

Discussion - Moderator Nick Livingston, Director of Strategic Development, Arts Council of Northern Ireland P.11

Presentations – How the Arts Contribute to Transforming Society in Northern Ireland: Examples from the digital World and Public Realm P.13
Moderator Sabine Frank with
- Nóirín McKinney, Director of Arts Development, Arts Council of Northern Ireland
- Fionnuala Walsh, Head of Community and Participatory Arts, Arts Council of Northern Ireland
  Conor Shields, Community Arts Partnership
- Lesley Cherry, Artist
P.13

Excursions – Looking at Transformative Arts Practices Connecting Creativity Community Arts Practice in Northern Ireland with P.20
- Conor Shields and Guido Orlandini Community Arts Partnership
- Music and Community Bridging - Oh Yeah Music Centre
  With Paul Kane, Suzel Reily and Dušica Parezanović
- Theatre Outside Theatres - Kabosh Theatre
  With Paula McFetridge, Laurence McKeown and Aleksandar Brkic
- Traditional Songs and Story-Telling within Contemporary Visual Arts Practices Lawrence Street Workshops
  With Phil Hession and Herman Bashiron Mendolicchio

Drinks reception at Parliament Buildings Stormont P.25
Hosted by the Michelle McIlveen, MLA, Chair of the Northern Ireland Assembly Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee

6th Intercultural Practice Exchange, Belfast 2012– Report

3
DAY 3

THE ROLE OF THE ARTS IN PROMOTING INCLUSION
FROM AN EQUALITY STANDPOINT
Feedback on Transformative Arts Practice in Northern Ireland from the comparative perspective of outside observers – Moderator Nóirín McKinney, Director of Arts Development, Arts Council of Northern Ireland with
- Guido Orlandini, Intercultural Communication and Leadership School
- Dušica Parezanović, Trans Europe Halles
- Aleksandar Brkic, University of Arts in Belgrade
- Herman Bashiron Mendolicchio, University of Barcelona

Panel Presentation - Overview of the Equality Landscape:
The reasons behind the introduction of legislation and its impact on arts organisations – Moderator Rani Kasapi, Riksteatern with
- Roisín Mallon, Equality Commission Northern Ireland
- David Hill, Crescent Arts Centre
- John Gray, Social Historian

THE ROLE OF THE ARTS AND THE CHALLENGES FACING NORTHERN IRELAND
Local Politicians share their views on the impact of local and regional arts. Moderator Chris Torch, Intercult with
- Chris Lyttle MLA, Alliance Party
- Dominic Bradley MLA, Social Democratic Labour Party
- Councillor Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, Sinn Féin
- Councillor Christopher Stalford, DUP – unable to attend
- Mike Nesbit, MLA, Unionist Party – unable to attend

CLOSING COMMENTS - Roisin McDonough

RAPPORTEUR’S OBSERVATIONS - Dr Katy Radford

CONCLUSIONS

ABOUT PIE’s INTERCULTURAL PRACTICE EXCHANGES AS A SERIES
- Definition, context and previous Practice Exchanges
- Basic Concept of Intercultural Practice Exchanges
OVERVIEW

Background to the Sixth Intercultural Practice Exchange

A civil society response to the European Union’s Year of Intercultural Dialogue of 2008 saw the establishment of the Platform for Intercultural Europe (PIE). The body is now recognised by the European Commission as a civil society interlocutor and it provides a network and links between individuals and organisations throughout Europe from myriad backgrounds and disciplines seeking to exchange intercultural practice and discourse. The strategic aim is to advance policy proposals and developments locally, nationally and at a trans-European level.

Its impact is far reaching, spanning and connecting elected representatives, policy makers, academics, human rights advocates, formal and informal educators, with grassroots activists, practitioners and community led organisations. The breadth of expertise and interests of those connected to the PIE is furthered through Intercultural Practice Exchanges of which this was the sixth. Participants are united by a commitment to better understand and respectfully contribute to an intercultural Europe. The showcasing of best practice from diverse traditions and cultures within specific local contexts provides an opportunity to reflect on the wider socio-political and economic impact of intercultural policy development.

The hosting of the exchange in Northern Ireland provided a unique opportunity for the Platform to consider perspectives on interculturalism from within a society emerging from a prolonged and violent conflict, and one which has developed some of the most comprehensive equality legislation in Europe to support the rights of the indigenous minority and majority communities alongside those of new immigrants.
DAY ONE

Welcome reception
Address by Bob Collins, Chair Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI)

Delegates to the conference were welcomed and staff from both ACNI and PIE were thanked for their work on the programme. Mr Collins spoke of Northern Ireland as a region that had made a significant journey as it has emerged from violence but acknowledged, with regret, that conflict remains.

Sabine Frank, Secretary General, Platform for Intercultural Europe, reflected on the relevance of discussing the arts at a time of pan-European economic austerity politics and uncertainty.

Roisín McDonough welcomed the Platform partnership guests to MacNeice House and thanked the attendant musicians for their contribution to the evening’s hospitality.

Musicians: Stevie Dunne, Darragh Murphy, Ryan O’Donnell
DAY TWO

THE ROLE OF THE ARTS IN POST CONFLICT NORTHERN IRELAND
An exploration of the social, economic and political impact of the Arts

Welcome – Sabine Frank, Secretary General, Platform for Intercultural Europe (PIE) and Roisín McDonough, Chief Executive, Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI)

Sabine Frank welcomed delegates acknowledging the breadth of social cohesion interests within the room, all of which have the arts at their core. She offered the reflection of having externally observed the progression of the Northern Ireland conflict throughout the course of her life since adolescence through to professionally welcoming delegations from Northern Ireland to the European Parliament, in particular through the Peace II programme with its focus on promoting “an outward and forward looking region by encouraging dialogue with other EU regions”. Sabine suggested this objective remains an essential component of the work of the EU and that collaboration permeates the role of the PIE.

A brief background to PIE as an international association was provided recognising that it currently comprises 55 member organisations from the EU and beyond (such as the Ukraine and Armenia), with varied interests including education, minority rights, anti-discrimination and inter-faith dialogue, with a commitment to interculturalism and the principle of evolving cultures through intercultural engagement. The Manifesto “Rainbow Paper” of 2008 outlines the aims and objectives of the PIE and was developed after extensive consultation. All members sign up to its principles and ethos, with a focus on interaction enabling the membership to create a unique group dynamic and methodology. Now an established structured dialogue partner between civil society and EU institutions, PIE is called on in relation to matters of cultural diversity and inter-cultural dialogue in the context of the Open Method of Coordination process through which member states engage in the advancement of policy on culture. Other work of PIE was cited, including:

- maintaining an on-line resource collection;
- holding an annual forum for members and other interested parties,
- developing a news bulletin, website and expert discussion papers;
- Intercultural practice exchanges.
Ms Frank outlined how the Intercultural Practice Exchange offers the opportunity to sample intercultural work in different locations of Europe, sharpening what feeds into the EU processes representing civic society. Its relevance and importance locally can be found in relation to how arts play a relevant role in providing a voice for those who are otherwise silent, as a force for civilisation permitting an expression of humanity and providing an antidote to despair. This particular exchange provides the Platform participants with an opportunity to learn about:

- the role of arts in a peace process;
- the deployment of the arts by the state; and,
- the role of the arts as a tool for the transformation of society.

It was suggested that peace has depended on an understanding and strengthening of complementary or concentric identities. Such a shift in attitude to identity begs questions as to how diversity through immigration impacts on definitions of identity – is it people’s roots, their love of the place they live in, or the contribution they make to society, which determines their perceived belonging? In Northern Ireland, the ACNI Intercultural strategy plays a key role in this process and is an exemplar, along with equality schemes of how organisational change can be drawn on to promote intercultural exchange.

**Roisín McDonough** referred to the connections made in Ljubljana and the ongoing international work of ACNI. She proposed that PIE in Belfast provides a timely opportunity for delegates to learn about moving from violent conflict to relatively peaceful coexistence if not yet integration. Similarly, as Northern Ireland adjusts clumsily and painfully to the legacy of the conflict, the region is also adapting to the challenges and opportunities brought by new migration from those from and beyond the European accession countries and in particular who contribute from a non Christian and non-white background using arts as part of this process.

By way of evidencing how Northern Ireland ‘punches above its weight’ in relation to a variety of art forms, reference was made to Liam Neeson, Seamus Heaney and Van Morrison as three internationally recognised artists. However and perhaps more importantly in relation to this conference, Northern Ireland is able to evidence, based on international comparison, its strength and commitment to community based arts. This has proved to be central to the transition from a troubled past and will without doubt have a significant impact on the future. Artists and community workers are at the core of delivering change both through accessibility to and development of social cohesion programmes and the ACNI recognise that over the last decade in particular there has been a huge investment in and growing strength of such work.

The presentation on the Reimagining Programme will address this further and ACNI remain committed to working with communities to help transform them. The Intercultural Arts Strategy intends to consolidate and build on existing work working with minority ethnic and faith communities to promote cultural pluralism.

Northern Ireland continues to undergo significant transformations with arts playing a key role in this, not least the anticipated positive legacy that will be brought through the awarding of the 2013 UK City of Culture to Derry/Londonderry.

Ms McDonough ended her address by stressing the value of the relationship between ACNI, PIE and the individual members recognising their shared aims of strengthening civic society and the importance of holding the moment where citizens, through the arts and cultural practices can have a say in how society is shaped. She suggested that such relationships strengthen democracy at a time when democracy is under a real and palpable threat globally and that art brings a critical commentary and consequently needs to be supported and funded as an act of democracy. It is important that while
Public bodies recognise that they have responsibilities in this regard, it is also up to civic society, local communities and neighbourhoods to respond. Opportunities like this Practice Exchange provide a platform for multiple narratives to aid a self-reflective process.

**PRESENTATION**

*14 Years after the Good Friday Agreement: Remaining Challenges for Peace and Cohesion*

- Paul Nolan, Research Director, Community Relations Council (CRC) Northern Ireland

*Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report, Number One*

Discussion Moderator and introduction by Nick Livingston, Director of Strategic Development, Arts Council of Northern Ireland

Nick Livingston introduced Paul Nolan’s presentation noting that fourteen years after the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland remains a divided society. He said the report provides a scene setting piece, which would provide a stimulating introduction for visitors taking part in the Practice Exchange and highlight the striking paradox that despite the journey towards normalisation in post conflict society, there is the ever present witness of conflict.

Paul Nolan began by providing an introduction to his report for the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The Foundation’s focus on poverty and social exclusion is connected, in Northern Ireland, to the circumstances in which the peace process is played out and might be considered reminiscent of the Escher staircase drawings in its complexity and inter-relations – simultaneous progression and regression. Dr Nolan referred to Johan Galtung’s definition of a Negative Peace (i.e. the absence of violence) looking at the structural stressors where the hairline cracks can occur. Considering that the mostly secure and successful political institutions comprise strange bedfellows, he made reference to a series of positive media images indicating the visual unity of former political opponents now operating within a 3-strand consensus\(^1\). His presentation drew on a wide range of references, which in the first instance suggested that the present political arrangement\(^2\)

---

1. This refers to the working relationship between the British Government, the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly.
2. Whilst most Departments in the Northern Ireland Executive are led by individual ministers, the two principal parties in Northern Ireland, the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Fein, work together through the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on a wide portfolio of work and key issues affecting the Executive including infrastructural investments, good relations, international relations, emergency planning. This effectively creates a two-party state political system.
was supported by 58% of population as first choice with the impact of spoiler groups consolidating rather than upsetting political structures\(^3\). Dr Nolan highlighted the following issues:

Level of Violence - Despite the killing of Prison Officer David Black in November 2012, the level of violence is down with a comparison made between the numbers of security related deaths, agricultural accidents, road deaths and those by alcohol and suicide. Dr Nolan compared the security related deaths between 1994 and 2011 and contextualised bombings and shootings against other deaths.

Sectarian Crimes - Dr Nolan considered the decrease in the reporting of sectarian crimes and suggested that the risks of being a victim in Northern Ireland were lower than in other areas of the United Kingdom and Ireland. Whilst paramilitarism remains a threat, he suggested that there had been reduction of sectarian violence by those who are wedded to conflict, and referred to the final report in 2011 of the International Monitoring Commission\(^4\) when suggesting that guns are more likely to be used by Republican dissidents whereas other weaponry is favoured by Loyalists and that clearance rates for the crime of punishment attacks reported to the Police Service of Northern Ireland is less than 4% in part due to the challenge of getting people into courts.

In Derry/Londonderry, levels of fear are reported to be higher than at any point in the previous 40 years as groups no longer have a political project.

Equality Agenda - Dr Nolan suggested that the recession affects the equality agenda. He made reference to unemployment figures in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, the United Kingdom and in Europe noting that Northern Ireland’s were lower, and youth unemployment was only lower in Germany. He noted that deprivation was higher amongst Catholic communities than Protestants\(^5\) and that education is an important source for Catholic social mobility\(^6\) which in turn means that labour market participation rates of Catholics and Protestants are converging.

Mapping Political Traditions - Social housing accounts for 16% of Northern Ireland housing stock - 90% of which is found in single identity communities. There is limited mobility for those in social housing - and 93.5% of education in schools is segregated along the lines of ethno-political nationalism.

New Migration - Between July 2000 and June 2010 there were 122,000 new migrants to Northern Ireland. Prior to 1975 all migration was outward bound, between 1998 and 2008 it was both in and out and since the accession of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia in 2004 it has now stabilised. Official figures are unreliable, patched together from a variety of sources\(^7\) and do not account for undocumented workers. Proxy indicators such as births to mothers from

---

\(^3\) The concept of spoiler groups was first posited by S.J. Stedman, ‘Spoiler problems in peace processes’, International Security, 22, 2 (Fall 1997), pp. 5-53 when referring to spoilers as ‘leaders and parties who believe that peace emerging from negotiations threatens their power, worldview, and interests and use violence to undermine attempts to achieve it.’ – within the Northern Ireland context it is used widely to refer to elected and unelected leaders in groups whose ‘spoiling’ can be on a scale that incorporates both democratic and violent means.

\(^4\) An organisation founded in 2004 as part of the British Irish Government Agreement of 2003 whose remit included the monitoring of activities by paramilitary groups

\(^5\) Figures from the Family Resources Survey

\(^6\) 74.2% Catholic Girls in Rural areas who were not eligible for free school meals were able to achieve 2 or more ‘A’ levels whereas only 11.6 % of boys in urban areas who were eligible for free school meals were able to achieve the same grades.

\(^7\) Some calculations are gauged on NINOs (National Insurance Numbers), Workers Registration details, school census and births to mothers from outside the UK and Ireland.
outside the UK and the Republic of Ireland as well as school census figures suggest substantially higher immigration rates and also indicate that immigrants are settling permanently.

**Racist Hate Crime** – Northern Ireland was once referred to in the media as the European capital for hate crime – this is no longer the case. Dr Nolan referred to evidence that racist hate crime is lower than in the UK and that attitudinal change has seen increased acceptance of diversity - to some extent this rationalises the critic Edna Longley who suggested that Northern Ireland is a cultural corridor between Britain and Ireland. Dr Nolan noted in particular that immigration has not featured negatively in the political discourse of Northern Ireland.

Dr Nolan ended his presentation with an open question as to what model best represents the diversity of Northern Ireland. He considered that a typology such as multi-ethnic provided too sociological a proposal whereas multi-cultural, he suggested, leant towards a definition of policy directed towards equality and access to services, and, along with the Council of Europe’s framework Convention for The Protection of National Minorities (Article 3.1) could serve to problematise the notion of mobility, freezing ethnic identity.

Drawing on examples of Anna Lo, MLA, Magdalena Wolska and Mateusz Jadczak he suggested that a model of interculturalism permits a reallocation of identity and replaces problematic notions of assimilation.

**Nick Livingston opened the floor to questions and comments:**

**Chris Torch** (Intercult) questioned whether the low figures for racist hate crime are an indicator that the ‘desire’ for racist hate crime in a sectarian society actually mean that crimes against migrants tend to ‘slide under the radar’?

**Paul Nolan** agreed adding “Sectarianism is our ‘main hobby’”.

---


11. Longley E., (1987) ‘Opening Up: A New Pluralism’ *Fortnight No.256* (November 1987) views Ulster as a ‘cultural corridor’ with the unionists trying to block one end and the republicans the other “Culture, like common sense, insists it can’t be done. Ulster Irishness and Ulster Britishness are bound to each other and to Ireland and Britain. Only by promoting circulation within and through Ulster will the place ever be part of a healthy system.”

12. Anna Manwah Lo was elected Member of the Local Assembly for the Alliance Party in 2007 becoming the first politician of East Asian heritage to be elected to a legislative body in the UK or Ireland.

13. Ms Wolska is Polish born and was elected for the SDLP in 2011

13. Mateusz Jadczak achieved top marks in GCSE Irish only 7 years after migrating to Ireland.
Charo Madden Lanao (Peripheral Vision) commented on the need to address the quality of contact between those from diverse backgrounds and to unpack the level and depth of any meaningful relationships.

Deirdre McBride (Community Relations Council) commented on the impact of race hate crimes in specific geographical areas and the need for greater analysis of the control of paramilitaries in those areas. She also drew attention to the consequences for people in small communities when an individual attack occurs. She said that statistics cannot measure the negative impact on small communities of even one attack.

Paul Nolan concurred with the point and gave an example of the expulsion of Roma and Poles from communities and the burning on bonfires of Magdalena Wolska’s election posters. He suggested this was the result of loyalists exercising paramilitary power. He acknowledged the need for an understanding of the micro dynamics in areas with small pockets of minority communities.

Deepa Mann-Kler (Artist) commented on the need to capture and monitor people’s multi-faceted identities. She further commented on the misnomer of ‘integrated education’ - it is structured to comply with a Christian ethos and make up only, leaving other religious identities and secularism aside.

EVALUATION

This session was positively received by all those who commented on it and described by one respondent as ‘one of the highlights of the conference’, **88% of those who filled out evaluations rated the session as good to excellent with the remaining 12% either not attending the session or not responding to the questions.** The density of the overview provided a broad-brush quantitative context and scene setting for the conference. Participants would have liked to have been presented with copies of the report.

---

14 The full text of the Peace Monitoring Report can be found at [http://www.community-relations.org.uk/peace-monitor](http://www.community-relations.org.uk/peace-monitor), accessed 8th December 2012
PRESENTATIONS

How the Arts Contribute to Transforming Society in Northern Ireland: Examples from the digital World and Public Realm

The Troubles Archive,
- Nóirín McKinney, Director of Arts Development, Arts Council of Northern Ireland

The Reimaging Communities Programme,
- Fionnuala Walsh, Head of Community and Participatory Arts, Arts Council of Northern Ireland
- Conor Shields, Community Arts Partnership and
- Lesley Cherry, Artist

Moderator: Sabine Frank

The Troubles Archive

Nóirín McKinney, Director of Arts Development, Arts Council of Northern Ireland

Nóirín McKinney spoke of the development of “The Troubles Archive” and the challenges brought to curators in establishing which art works should be included. This was particularly so when determining the direct connections between particular pieces of work and a timeline of events. This was considered to be an important tension, as society is as much defined by the art it produces as artists and their work are defined by their context. Ms McKinney acknowledged that while artists in Northern Ireland can have the same international concerns as others in Europe, arts in Northern Ireland are distinguished by a particular ‘attitude’, and the ‘Troubles’ have given artists an original and distinctive grain to their voice.

The Archive is a compendium of artwork created over a period of approx. 40 years allowing for a greater insight into how politics and sectarianism forged events and artistic responses. She recognised the role of the arts as an educational tool to understand the conflict and the impact of arts on conflict in Northern Ireland. The Archive was cited as being a valuable complement to existing archives held in the Ulster Museum, the Linenhall Library, Belfast Exposed, and CAIN (Conflict Archive on the Internet). The Troubles Archive allows its users to both dip into and re-tread familiar ground as much as to find new insights. Motivation for the use of the Archive can be

The Troubles Archive is an on-line resource due to become active in 2014. The Archive has been complemented by the commissioning of a series of essays by specialists which have been published by the Arts Council for Northern Ireland which were presented to all delegates. The Archive is an on-going work.

found in the quote of Spanish philosopher George Santayana: “Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it.”

Ms McKinney then drew on the work of Northern Irish artists beginning with a quotation from Seamus Heaney’s poem ‘North’: “Whatever You Say, Say Nothing” was his snipe at both politicians’ and citizens’ resistance to discuss sectarian division. She provides this as an example of the Archive as a remarkable body of political work; the accompanying essays provide stimulating interpretation. She commented on how the Archive could serve younger artists as a backdrop to their own developments, whilst older artists understood that this body of work represented a collapse of their old order of chaos ruling in conflict. She mentioned the wide and diverse poetic responses to particular events ranging from Padraic Fiac’s ‘Tears/A Lacrimosa’, through Michael Longley’s ‘Ceasefire’ in the aftermath of the release of paramilitary prisoners as a result of the Good Friday Agreement, through to Leontia Flynn’s ‘Drives’ satirising the impact of the Peace dividend, with final reference to the body of work by Sinead Morrissey, which she described as valid and meaningful. In relation to visual arts, reference was made to the work of Jack Pakenham and the totemic, masked and gagged theatrical figures alongside grinning ventriloquist dummies which realise a “moral outrage dripping off the canvases” and which were deemed as ferocious in response to the work of Padraic Fiac. Ms McKinney referred to the witty work of John Kindness in his ‘Romulus and Seamus’ statue and to feminist Rita Duffy’s ‘Big Fight’ which provides a cover to the essay ‘A fusillade of question marks’ and which was developed to reflect the division she saw around her. In terms of musical contributions, Ms McKinney measured the politically charted response of the ‘Wolfe Tones’ to the pleas for reconciliation by Tommy Sands, whilst recognising that many artists remained artistically detached from the Troubles.

Ms McKinney said the Archive was a response to the need for feelings to be kept alive. She referred to the complex questions posed by such works of art but suggested there are no simple answers to them - as political journalist Fintan O’Toole had suggested: “one of the most potent things about art is its capacity to question.” In so doing, art opens up possibilities, allowing us to imagine a better future. The paradoxes and complexities of the human condition in art can also be found in Feargal Keane’s essay The View from the Outside in which he suggests that “Truth should be spoken, but it must be truth of human complexity, compassion and generosity, the truth of pain and love”. As such he exemplifies how song, dance, music and poetry offer a good route into a culture.

The Archive is an antithesis to the Troubles, providing the opportunities to explore commonalities at a time when we work towards a shared future.

There was acknowledgment that the Archive compilation had been a contentious project, not least because of copyright but also because of choices having to be made as to inclusion. In so doing she commented on the breadth of the Archive paying tribute to those artists, practitioners and experts who wrote essays on diverse categories of the arts, including: film, poetry and popular music naming some of the 80 artists and 116 sculptures and paintings within it. She made reference to the archive’s time-line, sometimes implicit and sometimes inferred in the work, making reference to Paul Muldoon’s 1981 poem ‘Mink’ about the killing of Captain Robert Nairac in 1997, and Brian Moore’s novel ‘Lies of Silence’, the film ‘Shoot to Kill’, and John Keane’s painting ‘God and Ulster’, depicting John Keane with a UVF paramilitary of the same name.

Ms McKinney ended with the proposition that the Archive enables us to bear witness to a troubled past where the arts can help build a better future for Northern Ireland.

---

ended with a quotation from playwright and film maker Dave Duggan citing Imelda Foley’s essay on Theatre - "I’m riddled with it. The past. The truth. The truth of the past. All through me. Stuff that happened between 1969 – remember that? – when the country collapsed into crisis under its own weight – and now – with the stuttering Peace Process continuing."

Sabine Frank opened the discussion to the floor:

David Calvert (Kids in Control) commented on the amount of community arts practices and of performance arts that had been lost as a result of practitioners not being able to chronicle or log what they had undertaken in part due to poor funding. He then asked whether the Archive would yet come to address this issue.

Nóirín McKinney responded that projects need time brackets to get started and the Archive’s brackets were the period 1968-1998. She acknowledged that there remains a raft of work relating to the Troubles that needs to be considered but as part of the early discussions for the archive and because of resource limitations, it had been decided to focus on seminal works. The Archive is and would remain, however, a work in progress.

Christa-Maria Lerm-Hayes (University of Ulster) explained that she had been attracted to Northern Ireland specifically because of the community art work being undertaken in the region. She urged for the inclusion of work of performance artists such as Alistair MacLennan, and related her plea to the fact that European conceptual and performance artists had had such a great impact in the 1960s around the Auschwitz trials in Germany.

Nóirín McKinney acknowledged the value placed on performance art, she confirmed that there is reference in the Declan Long’s essay to Joseph Beuys’ long connection with Northern Ireland.

Chris Torch pointed out that there is a wind blowing throughout Europe which brings a focus on the citizens/audience/visitor rather than the exclusivity of the artist. He therefore asked how the Archive can ‘change’ the users, how it could be given an interactive and participatory nature.

Roisín McDonough reiterated that the Archive had plenty of scope for development. In the near future the collection would, for example, also include songs of freedom and protest. Moreover, ex-prisoners had been commissioned to contribute their views on the arts and crafts and their impact on their sensibilities and lived experience.

Chris Torch further suggested that there may be merit in placing the Archive in European and indeed global context – 1968 also saw the Parisian student revolution, the

---

20 During the 1960s and 1970s whilst some international artists were reluctant to visit or work in Northern Ireland, others, including Beuys made particular efforts to develop discourse in relation to arts practice and theory whilst here. They are remembered with fondness and respect for their contributions.
collapse of Latin American dictatorships. This might provide an interesting additional perspective.

**Reimaging Communities**

*This programme was presented by three people, who were closely associated with its implementation:*

**Fionnuala Walsh**, Head of Community and Participatory Arts, Arts Council of Northern Ireland, explained that the Reimaging Communities programme was rooted in the government strategy “Building a Shared Future” which in 2006 anticipated a community cohesion and reintegration strategy to be implemented by all government departments. The Department of Culture Arts and Leisure was committed to that process and sought to provide a properly resourced interventions in order to harness the hope so keenly felt in communities. The Reimaging Communities Programme was a community arts initiative begun in 2006 to address visible signs of racism and sectarianism with strategic themes including working towards a shared future, normalising civic society, furthering good community relations, diversity, stability and community cohesion.

ACNI’s commitment to regeneration through the arts builds on the agency’s track record of community arts as a dialogue tool. The Reimaging programme commenced as a neighbourhood renewal initiative linked to existing neighbourhood renewal programmes.

The programme delivery was overseen by a shared Communities Consortium. This comprised members from statutory service providers and specialists brought in to ensure responsibility and accountability to communities. The programme offered grants up to £15K or £50K as well as technical assistance for planning permissions etc. Community organisations and local authorities could apply and applications were independently evaluated. The final awards were made in December of 2010 and a total of over £3 million was committed to 159 projects. The greatest number of these (110) came from the Community and Voluntary sector, 49 from District Councils, 92 from Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities and 27 from Catholic/Nationalist/Republican communities.

---

21 Housing associations, neighbourhood associations etc were eligible. Given the long history and norm of political activists and in particular former non-state combatants being employed as community workers within the voluntary sector, it was essential for the success of the project that close working relationships were secured with those elected and unelected community activists working at a local level who are most often referred to as community gate-keepers and who are understood in common parlance to be closely connected to former armed groups.
Examples were given from the geographical regions of

- Tiger’s Bay in North Belfast: between August 2008 and Nov 2009 the artist Ross Wilson worked with communities in an area of high social deprivation to remove 5 paramilitary murals and ‘soften’ one.\(^\text{22}\)
- Lincoln Courts Youth and Community Association in City of Derry: the removal of paramilitary murals by artist Kevin Killen required challenging negotiations with local community activists who perceived the removal as a loss of identity.\(^\text{23}\)

The evaluation of the project covered the use of shared spaces, the strengthening of relations between communities, the building of capacity in communities, etc. The evaluation concluded that the programme had acted as a catalyst for physical improvements in neighbourhoods, their opening up to the outside, the inclusion of marginalised individuals and groups, an opening up of the arts, and a raised profile of artists. The programme also increased local capacity to apply for other funding streams. Whilst the programme has temporarily closed, its continuation from January 2013 has been secured. The intention will be to explore ways to link the programme to the Arts Council’s Intercultural Arts Strategy, i.e. it will also address the artistic representation in public space of new minorities in Northern Ireland and the relationship of their communities with those from the majority communities.

Conor Shields, director of The Community Arts Partnership, spoke of his organisation\(^\text{24}\) as being the first to work on replacing paramilitary or sectarian images, for example at the Ardoyne/Woodvale interface. He highlighted that new murals are enablers of change; if the legacy of the conflict is to be addressed, there needs to be support for communities to articulate and express change and to progress culturally without detriment to their own identity. This must occur in a communicative arena where the ‘theatre’ of the creative interface is a shared one.

Drawing on the work of photographer and cultural anthropologist Neil Jarman\(^\text{25}\) from the Institute for Conflict Research, he suggested that the majority of mural making has an explicit semiotic and political agenda: territory is marked and seemingly unilateral sensibilities in communities are branded under pressure from paramilitary groups\(^\text{26}\). Murals symbolise the different aspirations of the two communities and provide competing ethnographies and ethno-cultural images about contested histories.

Mr Shields explained that the process to remove and replace murals crucially commenced with an invitation to communities and was followed by an analysis of communities’ needs during which it was key to minimise the role of gatekeepers (see footnote 19). His presentation ended with the comment that the Reimaging Communities programme was “the most significant public and community based artistic intervention in Western Europe” – the scale of its civic renewal and peace/reconciliation aspects are unprecedented.

\(^\text{24}\) The Community Arts Partnership was formed in 2011 after the merger of New Belfast Community Arts Initiative (New Belfast) with the Community Arts Forum (CAF). Mr Shields formerly worked at New Belfast at the time of the commencement of the Reimaging programme.
\(^\text{26}\) The presence of murals aligned to one paramilitary or political faction can indicate the strength of that community in a particular area, but rarely indicates that support for that group is monolithic. The repainting of murals within communities is explored in Jarman N “Death of a Mural”, Northern Ireland Mural Directory, CAIN Website
The artist Lesley Cherry, talked about the difference between murals in loyalist and republican traditions. She worked on a Protestant Unionist Loyalist (PUL) inner city estate in Belfast with a high level of deprivation between 2009-2012. She referred to the tendency in PUL communities for images to be less socially aware and for there to be more images of masked men than in Catholic, Nationalist Republican (CNR) areas although territorial markings in each area could be distinguished by subject matter. Ms Cherry spoke of the need to build relationships prior to her work to replace the Cromwell mural and the need to avoid ‘plop art’ – where an artist parachutes into an area. She commented on the practice of the Community Arts Partnership who understood the pressure certain political parties put on communities not to remove particular murals. To illustrate this she referred to the pressure put on the community by the DUP not to remove the Drumcree mural. She spoke also of the community’s positive response to class politics through graffiti in the area calling for regeneration and not gentrification, and for social housing rather than ‘yuppie apartments’. Ms Cherry discussed her art processes, the use of new imagery and new forms including aluminium and digital media photography as opposed to paint. She referred to the use of the slogan “Nothing about us without us is for us” and her use of over 1,000 images of name places and individuals that were used to give a sense of place and character to the work indicating the artist’s commitment to a collective process grounded in community consultation processes. The community’s initial desire for a garden of reflection and memorial were discussed and eventually an agreement was reached that saw instead the erection of a steel sculpture comprising the words Remember/Respect/Resolution and which rested behind cobbled stones. Ms Cherry spoke of it being a privilege to see how a community progressed as part of the art engagement process which she referred to as “Teaching without Preaching”.

27 The Lower Shankill Estate on the Shankill Road was the site of the beginning of a large-scale region-wide intra-loyalist feud in August 2000 which resulted in the displacement of a large number of families and individuals in particular from the Lower Shankill Estate area and a number of lost lives over the following year. As inter-group rivalries settled, a series of explicitly paramilitarist murals emerged in the area, but after the feud had settled, these were repainted and replaced during the period 2002-2008 with a series of ‘cultural’ murals including historical events and characters such as Oliver Cromwell. The replacement murals were developed as a direct community based response to changing paramilitary allegiances in the area. In 2010, Ms Cherry through the Reimaging programme began to work with the community to replace these historical and cultural heritage loyalist murals with images reflecting other sensibilities and narratives from within the community.

28 Murals in Catholic Nationalist Republican areas can draw on solidarity with international struggles against oppression and contested sovereignties whereas within Protestant Unionist and Loyalist communities, murals tend to be more focussed on paramilitarism or Anglo Irish and Planter histories.

29 The Drumcree conflict came to worldwide media attention between 1995 and 1998 as large-scale policing and army operation to protect and uphold the rights of residents and the Orange Order in relation to a contested parade. Several lives were lost as a result of the stand-off.

30 “Nihil de nobis, sine nobis” is an often used political slogan first used in the UK in the 1990s by disability rights campaigners. It has its European roots in 19th Century Hungarian foreign policy and rose to popular use in post World War II Poland.

Comments and questions from the floor:

Veronika Tóth (Ministry of Human Resources, Hungary): How do you conduct consultations in these situations?

Conor Shields responded by referring to work with four local community groups and two churches that had wanted change but were “butting up against local paramilitaries”. Relationships were brokered through politicians and community groups.

Amos Greig (A New Ulster) spoke of concern that existing work being carried out in communities is at risk of being overlooked in favour of statutory interventions and spoke specifically about existing projects on the Lower Shankill estate through the Denmark Street Community Centre by way of acknowledging that non-political community art has long been a practice within communities and that the practitioners there would benefit from acknowledgement and recognition rather than the principal focus of community arts being the replacement or reimaging of other work.

David Calvert (Kids in Control): How did original mural artists feel about the reimaging?

Lesley Cherry responded that patriarchal attitudes were a challenge and whilst some images in her work were taken from old murals, there were some pieces on the estate, such as family memorials and the memorials of some paramilitary patriarchs that were not removed.

Mairead Quinn (ArtsEkta) spoke of her own experience of working with communities on social murals in West Belfast, which dealt with employment and poverty issues. She suggested that there needs to be caution to ensure that some norms within communities are not generalised and to recognise that gatekeepers are different in different communities. She made a plea for Reimaging Communities to include the upkeep and sustaining of existing murals that are valued within communities.

EVALUATION

Participants’ interest in both The Troubles Archive and The Reimaging Programme was clear from evaluation responses, though they would have welcomed additional opportunities to critically appraise and discuss them further in particular with community members who had taken part in the process and within a broader theoretical and international perspective. **68% of those attending the session evaluated this as good to excellent. It was regretted that the archive was not yet ‘live’.”**
Excursions – Looking at Transformative Arts Practices

1. Connecting Creativity – Community Arts Practice in Northern Ireland – With Conor Shields and Guido Orlandini Community Arts Partnership (Rapporteur: Sabine Frank)

Community Arts Partnership\(^{32}\) welcomed a group of about ten delegates to its premises to introduce them to the work of the organisation. The director, Conor Shields, explained that the key motivation stemmed from Article 27 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights: “Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.” In other words, the mission of CAP centres on the development of individuals as members of communities through active engagement in the arts. As such CAP is not guided by helping to attract investment to Belfast, nor does it have a specific reconciliation remit but has contributed to peace building efforts over the years. CAP runs an array of workshops for which there are on average four times more applicants than there are places: “Landmarks” (collaborative creation of public sculptures such as “Belfast Bloom” in the Belfast Botanic Garden, “Masque” (a carnival arts programme), “Trash Fashion” (up-cycling second hand clothing), “This Is Me” (a multi-media project exploring identity), “Side by Side” (focus on people with disabilities), and “Schools and Poetry in Motion Community”. In an average year, over 3,500 participants complete CAP projects. CAP also seeks to affect policy so that access and participation are prioritised.

The discussion veered towards a continuation of the morning’s subject on the replacement of murals, where Conor Shields had also been a speaker. Some participants had clearly felt that certain aspects of this issue had not come to the fore. Somebody pointed out, for example, that the Reimaging Communities programme remained somewhat top-down because it was primarily targeted at local councils, whereas other organisations, which also work on the creation or replacement of murals, such as Groundwork, work directly with residents’ associations, women’s and youth groups. One of the participants from outside Northern Ireland questioned whether mural replacement really increased social cohesion – which he defined as the absence of divisions on matters of principle – or achieved “only beautification”. Another participant echoed this comment by pointing out that murals were about expressing contention, and that this needed to remain legitimate where aggression expressed in murals is being addressed. Another contributor pointed out that murals served different functions in different communities but both were primarily ways of expressing identity and solidarity for differing aspects of socio historical and ethno political allegiances. A further participant was happy to defend “beautification”: The

“broken window theory”\(^{33}\) had taught that efforts to keep up the appearance of a place prevent its (further) social decline. Another participant acknowledged the importance of the replacement of the Sandy Row mural\(^{34}\). Since the change she was much more comfortable to pass it on her daily walk to work and when passing it with visitors from abroad.

Conor Shields mentioned the research and advocacy work of Community Arts Partnership and also explained that the Community Arts Partnership has been host to the small lobby group the Minority Ethnic Arts Forum\(^{35}\) since its inception and that the organisation was getting ready to help with the implementation of the Arts Council’s Intercultural Arts Strategy. He said they were collecting reference materials and establishing databases in order to prepare for projects.

Guido Orlandini, the ‘external eye’ rapporteur for the excursion contrasted Conor’s presentation with an introduction to the work of the Intercultural Leadership School and in particular their workshops for young community leaders in Bradford around the themes of identity, leadership, conflict, media and networking.

2. Music and Community Bridging - Oh Yeah Music Centre

With Paul Kane, Suzel Reily and Dušica Parezanović

(Rapporteur: Dušica Parezanović)

The group was welcomed to the Oh Yeah Music Centre by broadcaster and founder, Stuart Bailie. Paul Kane made a presentation on the “Your Teenage National Anthem?” - a project based on the play ‘National Anthem’, by Colin Bateman. This commenced with an open call for music memories, photos, links, style and stories from the 1970’s onwards to consider how music and its fashion shaped people’s lives. The project included 30 participants, all of whom were white - 73% self-described as Protestant, 12% Catholic and 15% suggested they came from neither tradition. All were from the Greater Belfast area. The 3-month programme comprised 10 workshops with two facilitators\(^{36}\). He emphasized the project’s benefits to society, and stressed that


\(^{34}\) The original was by an unnamed community artists and showed a Balaklava wearing and machinegun-bearing man and the slogan to “You are now entering Loyalist Sandy Row, heartland of South Belfast Ulster Freedom Fighters”. It now depicts King William by established artist, Ross Wilson.


\(^{36}\) The project took place in Oh Yeah, Kilcooley, St. Patrick’s Church, Community Arts Forum, Men’s Shankill Group. Community workers contacted in other jurisdictions were unable to participate.
participants see themselves divided into musical rather than sectarian tribes. A
discussion took place as to how project workshops were opportunities for people to
speak about “The Troubles”, how sectarianism is a part of every day life, and about
resultant feelings of lost freedom. It was emphasised that music was a positive choice in
a place where choices are limited. Some of the project’s challenges included its limited
budget, a specific brief that was difficult to achieve in a short timeframe and limited
marketing. Misunderstandings reported in a local newspaper intimated that Colin
Bateman was trying to replace the British national anthem (“God Save the Queen”) thus
eroding a sense of Unionist/British/Loyalist identity. Other on-going projects in the
centre included the “Over The Hill Music Collective” - aimed at mature musicians, “In the
Mood” – a project based around 1942 when American troops were in Belfast, “Scratch”,
“Urban Affinity”, “Love Music Hate Racism”, work in partnership with the Irish Football
Association, the Roma Community and a project with Open Arts Choir, a choir for people
with and without disabilities.

Dr Suzel Reily, an ethnomusicologist at the Sonic Arts Centre at Queen's University,
Belfast made a presentation with a focus on the history and importance of music within
communities in Northern Ireland.

Both presenters answered questions on the position of the independent cultural workers
in the community, using music as a medium of networking, and the importance of long-
term community based projects.

3. Theatre Outside Theatres - Kabosh Theatre
With Paula McFetridge, Laurence McKeown and Aleksandar Brkic
(Report with thanks to participant Michael Walling37 and to Aleksandar
Brkic)

Paula McFetridge and Laurence McKeown of Kabosh - a theatre company which makes
work outside conventional spaces, interacting with and intervening in the urban
landscape - showed the group several samples of their work. This included a monologue
spoken at the Orwellian-named Peace Wall, in the character of a young Catholic girl who
dares to venture through the iron gates to see the young Loyalist man with whom she is
in love, and the play “Two Roads West”, of which a section was performed for the group
by Vincent Higgins – it was performed on the bus with which the group toured; the full
version is performed in a taxi, driven by Vincent, with another actor and an audience of
five. The play is a dialogue around the tourism of terror, as the taxi travels through the
Falls and Shankill Roads, encountering the sectarian symbols that still dominate these

37 Michael Walling, Artistic Director of Border Crossings. See also his blog post:
spaces - the tricolours and the Union Jacks, the murals of Bobby Sands and King Billy on his white horse. Paula told the group that the audience for this play don't look at the actors at all - they look at the city. Kabosh call their approach "curating of the moment", and key aspects of this are the decision of the location and the development of the narratives.

Participants from abroad, who are familiar with the names of these roads from news reports, were surprised how very close to one another they are. The driver explained, you turn right out of the Falls, you pass through the gates in the Peace Wall that are still locked every night, you turn right again, and you are in a totally different territory. Participants noted that even today, 14 years after the Good Friday Agreement, the city can still feel edgy and disturbing, unsettled, insecure.

The group went on to watch the last piece of the excursion at the Cultúrlann - an Irish language cultural centre on the Falls - and sat down to discuss what they had seen. Their hosts tell them a little about themselves: Laurence McKeown told that he joined the IRA at the age of 17, and remained a member for thirty years. He was a prisoner in the H-blocks, and took part in the hunger strike, when he came very close to death. It was while he was in prison that he started his creative work and began to change his views on how to affect change in Northern Ireland. Participants remarked how interesting it was to see how Kabosh manages to eliminate the usual distance between the performers, the space - which is the stage and the script at the same time, and the audience.

While participants found it hard to provide some kind of European perspective on the reconciliation of Catholic and Protestant in Northern Ireland, they found that the experience of 'stepping outside the space', which Laurence recorded vividly through the characters in Two Roads West, is one which can put the conflict in some sort of wider context. Moreover, the experiences of the delegates from former Yugoslavia, for example, did offer points of comparison, however specific the Northern Irish situation may be. Some participants noted that Europe has had a role in moving Northern Ireland to its current position and hoped that it is a lasting truce. They felt that because both the UK and the Irish Republic are members of the EU, borders are not so monolithic as they once were, and nationhood seems a more outmoded aspiration, or at least a different agenda. It was also mentioned that the emerging European models of multi-ethnic, intercultural spaces problematize nationalism and religious exclusivity.

4. Traditional Songs and Story-Telling within Contemporary Visual Arts Practices - Lawrence Street Workshops
   With Phil Hession and Herman Bashiron Mendolicchio
Lawrence Street Workshops is an oasis of recycled, reconstituted and reclaimed studio space in the heart of a high value area of Belfast. The building is owned and sublet by furniture maker and market trader, Marty Carter and run by him as a social economy enterprise. It is a creaky mishmash of quirky, stylish health and safety hazards spread out over two stories and a backyard that bolt together to create a unique haven for artists and practitioners to work with the feel and decor reminiscent of a 1970s co-operative or collective. Work in progress can be seen in the room where excursion participants met, including that of a textile artist whose fabrics comprise discarded tents that she gathers at the end of festivals. Her current project is to work with non-English speaking Muslim women asylum seekers creating hijabs out of the abandoned and ripped tents. Phil Hession and Marty Carter talked informally with participants about the challenges facing practitioners who are working in an area known for its conflict and using or producing materials that are perceived to be markers of ethno political allegiance when the artist does not consider their work to be rooted in the allegiances and origins which others project onto that work. A group discussion took place about the norm of essentialising instruments and repertoires in the public consciousness - as being associated with one community or another in Northern Ireland. This was reconsidered from a more nuanced perspective with reference to the shared learning between musicians on the islands of Britain and Ireland on an east-west, north-south basis. Hession’s work being displayed and discussed was in this instance the performance and recording of traditional Irish songs in intercultural contexts both locally and trans-nationally with non-English or Irish speaking audiences. His process might be interpreted as an attempt to subvert the interpretation and ownership of the form. Hession spoke of the multi-disciplinary collaborations he undertakes. By way of images and recordings of himself in performance, he provided a series of examples of spontaneous singing, which appeared to both disturb and amuse the audience. We completed our workshop with the rehearsal and recording of a song.

**EVALUATION**

51.51% of the participants found the excursions good to excellent. Responses ranged from those that found that the excursion had provided them with a “great insight into independent practitioners in Belfast” to those who would have liked more “structured discussion with delegates about the sessions.” Some participants welcomed the opportunity for small group work finding the participation component ‘brilliant’.
DRINKS RECEPTION AT PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS, STORMONT

Hosted by the Michelle McIlveen, MLA, Chair of the Northern Ireland Assembly Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee

On the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the construction of Parliament Buildings, the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee kindly hosted a drinks reception for the conference delegates. Michelle McIlveen MLA, Chair of the CAL committee warmly welcomed the delegates to Parliament Buildings. Ms McIlveen reflected on the importance of being part of an intercultural dialogue and also spoke about the work of her committee and its interest in the Intercultural Arts Strategy.

Bob Collins MLA, Chair of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland spoke of the importance of hosting a Practice Exchange in light of the growing diversity of the population in Northern Ireland.
DAY 3
THE ROLE OF THE ARTS IN PROMOTING INCLUSION FROM AN EQUALITY STANDPOINT

Feedback on Transformative Arts Practice in Northern Ireland from the comparative perspective of outside observers

Moderator Nóirín McKinney, Director of Arts Development, Arts Council of Northern Ireland with:
- Guido Orlandini, Intercultural Communication and Leadership School
- Dušica Parezanović, Cultural Centre REX, Belgrade (member of Trans Europe Halles)
- Aleksandar Brkic, University of Arts in Belgrade
- Herman Bashiron Mendolicchio, University of Barcelona

Guido Orlandini commented on the previous day’s excursion to the Community Arts Partnership (CAP) and commended CAP’s team for its passion to energise communities to live together more harmoniously, and recognised the variety of art forms used including public sculpture in parks. He suggested that culture is not just a human right but also a pleasure and that through engaging in arts practices, society can be transformed after human relations break down or are disrupted. He suggested that CAP’s ethos is “participant led and artist facilitated” which means artists are catalysts of processes, which wouldn’t happen if they weren’t there. He suggested that the Troubles Archive helps us to come to terms with the past in terms of literary and visual terms – but Northern Ireland shouldn’t try to cosmeticise the past and that the walls are part of a collective memory. While murals can be used as a form of exclusion, they are also a way to express a collective frame of mind – they express local identity and the cultures in which they originate.

Mr Orlandini further reflected on how this might relate to the Intercultural Leadership School of which he is both co-founder and Secretary General. He suggested that both organisations are attempting to create safe spaces for people to interact, to disagree and to build the capacity of key stakeholders to be actors in civic diplomacy. He felt that the principal protagonists in this process must be young, and still flexible, as mature or older people are more likely to be against change. Mr Orlandini described how his organisation injects topics and arguments into seminar work such as on religious identities and leadership capabilities. He reflected on the progression of conflict from an inter-personal level, to government to inter-state conflict. ICLS’ work encourages young people to form networks of trust from which they can work to diffuse tense events in their cities. Mr Orlandini provided delegates with copies of an evaluation of his organisation carried out
by Dr Michael Fryer, graduate of the Bradford Peace Studies Institute, which evidences the success of the programme by the participants’ progressions. He commented that Bradford, when provoked by the English Defence League, did not react. The ability of young people to disagree when necessary but without violence is key and art is as important influence in this respect as is finding employment. Citizenship for young people is crucial, and artists can help people to realise it.

Noírín McKinney invited comments on Guido Orlandini’s perspective on the excursion to Community Arts Partnership:

**David Calvert** (Kids in Control) asked if people recognised that there is a distinction between the proliferation of arts activities undertaken by the Community Arts Partnership and the need/passion/desire of other artists to create art within communities. He commented that the proliferation of arts money impacts on the quality of art – and that simply bringing people together to make a suspect piece of theatre or imposing a mural on them is not necessarily helpful to communities.

**Christa-Maria Lerm-Hayes** (University of Ulster) referred to how Declan McGonagle when at the Orchard Gallery engaged with the community and put the community and professional arts onto an international scale.

**Chris Torch** expressed his belief that art – whether community art or artist-centred art – needed to balance ethics and excellence. He said that art had no value unless a transformation occurs that is either political, social or economic – be it in the makers of art or the ‘consumers’ of art and ultimately in society as a whole.

**David Calvert** asked if it is not counterproductive to take children out of their communities to ‘create’ and then return them to a highly politicised environment.

**Julie Ward** (Jack Drum Arts) explained how she works in a white, monocultural environment in the North East of England and has attempted to open this up by extending invitations to people. She commented how in so doing, boundaries between different art forms can become blurred. There is something over and above art form practices, she suggested, which matters more and that is stepping outside narrow confines and blurring the boundaries and processes between different art form practices.
Dušica Parezanović related her participation in the previous day’s excursion to the Oh Yeah music centre to her work in Serbia. Serbia continues to emerge from conflict, but despite a dynamic political life concerned with addressing war crimes and reconciliation, it remains a country stuck in the past. Unlike Northern Ireland, the non-governmental organisations are often labelled as non-patriotic and as traitors of nationhood. Her centre was founded in the 1990s during a time of war, external migration and an economy in the doldrums.

Young people founded such centres to create free artistic zones and to change communities by inviting neighbours to participate in projects. The starting points are the needs of people; the aim is not simply to involve people into projects led by artists and guided by artists’ criteria. The process is tough, time consuming, but essential. The artistic merits of the project outcomes may be undervalued by the audiences of ‘professional’ arts, but this ignores the merits of the participatory process. The focal point of the contemporary arts alive in cultural centres such as Belgrade’s REX, is social engagement: being located in the outskirts of Belgrade in “an ugly neighbourhood”, there is a need to engage with neighbours. By contrast, the Oh Yeah Centre, located in the commercial city centre of Belfast, has the professional interests of musicians at heart – while being aware of the sub cultural power of music.

Ms Parezanović made particular reference to Oh Yeah’s project “What was your favourite song when you were a teenager” which she felt enabled trans-generational dialogue and was a fertile meeting ground for diverse people. She applauded the organisation despite being rooted in professional development, to have made space for social engagement with the project. It is important, she suggested, to remember that “process can be more important than product” and while there is an imperative in terms of outputs/outcomes and funding criteria, individuals’ lives can be marked by process.
Ms Parezanović’s account elicited the following questions and comments:

**Sabine Frank** referred to the statement that in Serbia non-governmental organisations are considered the enemy of public authority and wondered whether NGOs active on community cohesion and participation in Northern Ireland are special in that they broadly pull on the same rope as public authorities.

**Deidre McBride** (Community Relations Council) advised caution on this suggestion: She said that the vision of the peace process at the grass-roots level was broader than that of the political peace process. The grass-root process was therefore not as well supported by agencies and departments. She spoke of the delay in delivering the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy and of the dependency on foreign donors whose reduced funds are increasingly directed to local authorities who have no money for an independent cultural sector.

**Dušica Parezanović** took up the comment on the under-resourcing of the independent cultural sector in Northern Ireland and related it to the situation in Serbia: The Serbian National Theatre alone has 1,000 employees, while the whole the independent sector counts fewer than 1,000 employees.

**Katy Radford** (Institute for Conflict Research) commented that Northern Ireland’s voluntary and community sector has emerged strong from a variety of historical, social, economic and political circumstances. As a result Third Sector organisations in Northern Ireland were sometimes more able to both influence and respond rapidly to changes within the public sector than those in other jurisdictions.

**Roisín McDonough** referred to the on-going review of arms length bodies by the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL). She suggested that when there is a two party state political system (see footnote 2), the role of the Arts Council as an arm’s length body is to “manage the risk associated with the freedom of expression in the arts”.

**Nóirín McKinney** commented how the arts have crept up the political agenda during the past five years, which was especially visible with the investment in the arts infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

---

38 The term ‘arm’s length body’ refers to a non-departmental public body of which ACNI is one of a number core funded through the.
Aleksander Brkic fed back on the excursion with Kabosh theatre and commented on
three key issues in the practice which Kabosh had presented: Site specific theatre
methodology, community, and walls as metaphors. He explained that the excursion
participants had become audience participators through the performance glimpses they
were offered. They had also walked round the streets and walls as tourists and this
“exoticisation of conflict” was something with which he was familiar from the Balkans.
Site-specific work, suggested Mr Brkic, requires a theatre company to start with a
‘problem’ and to look for drama in a space. He commented on how Kabosh also actively
seeks out the values of their mobility as theatre makers, namely the possibility of getting
closer to communities and of maximising audience engagement. The ‘organic’ nature of
site-specific work such as on trans-generational violence, has a great emotional impact
on the visiting audience. While this methodology is powerful, it can be questioned for its
authenticity just like theatrical “reality television”.
Mr Brkic spoke of the powerful use of the wall by Kabosh as a poetic metaphor for the
division between people in life, and also in death. He said that dividing walls also stood
for the absurdity of “conflict becoming part of our system”. They can become a metaphor
for “fighting without truly knowing why anymore”. He referred to artistic deconstructions
of walls such as by “Artists against Walls”39, a cooperative working to subvert the
Separation Wall on the Westbank in Palestine, and by Banksy40.
Mr Brkic went on to describe two site-specific art projects in Belgrade: A performance
piece and installation “Picnic in the City”, created on a former green-field leisure site now
a commuter spot in the centre of town; and a Marcel Duchamp-style41 exhibition in the
backyard of an apartment block which was created by international students from the
narratives emerging from rubbish thrown into an unkempt communal space by residents.
This latter piece had an unintentional transformative outcome connecting neighbours
engaging in the process with those from whom they were previously estranged or living
in animosity.

Mr Brkic’s presentation prompted the following exchange:

Christa-Maria Lerm-Hayes (Ulster University) referred to Terry Eagleton’s42 comments
on Samuel Beckett: “If you add to the political drama the Politesque, we can’t but
become part of the system and an alibi to it” thus highlighting the fact that Beckett’s

work is the film “Love Sum Game” by Eytan Heller, which shows a tennis game taking place on both sides of
the Separation Wall.
40 “In August 2005, Banksy painted nine images on the Israeli West Bank barrier, including an image of a ladder
going up and over the wall and an image of children digging a hole through the wall.”
41 “Duchamp challenged conventional thought about artistic processes (...) through subversive actions. He
famously dubbed a urinal art and named it Fountain.” See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcel_Duchamp -
42 Influential British literary critic.
The work contained the ethical paradigm of not addressing politics directly. He gives hope by not naming suffering yet making audiences aware that it is wrong.

**Alexander Brkic** countered that artists being in the public space isn’t enough, rather that art needs to connect to the political space. He referred to Tariq Ali’s speech “The rotten heart of Europe” at the Festival of Subversive Art in Zagreb in 2012.

**Herman Bashiron Mendolicchio** responded to the excursion in Lawrence Street Studios and the work of Phil Hession. He began by observing that concepts for social transformation and interculturalism are deeply rooted in art practice, that art and creativity offer a different way to think about community, especially those of high plurality and complexity. He suggested that mobility and dialogue become necessary for coexistence, and that “art is a state of encounter”. He questioned how it is that art can transform people, their visions and perceptions of the environment. He suggested that people's relationship with artistic and cultural fields are increasingly expanding to include an engagement with science and the economy – as witnessed in the work of both Michelangelo Pistoletto and Nicolas Bourriaud.

Phil Hession’s art practices were interpreted by Mr Mendolicchio as relaying stories of different people from different cultural backgrounds in Northern Ireland and providing information about music and traditional song. In decontextualising Irish song by getting outsiders to perform it, for example, he addresses issues of ownership and authenticity, and helps depoliticise music. His purpose is not to be provocative, but to create dialogue and a bridge between the local and global, tradition and modernity. Mr Mendolicchio then spoke of work at the Maltese Marsa Open Detention Society carried out with political asylum seekers through the AStIDE (Art for the Responsible Transformation of Society and Intercultural Dialogue in Europe) trans-European project. He concluded that

---

43 “Artists must not be only in art galleries or museums, they must be present in all possible activities. The artist must be the sponsor of thought in whatever endeavour people take on at every level, from that of the masses to that of command”. [http://www.philamuseum.org/exhibitions/414.html](http://www.philamuseum.org/exhibitions/414.html)

44 “Giving news of the world, registering changes in our environments, showing how individuals move around in or form part of those environments; most so-called auteur films fulfilled these tasks some more diligently than others. In the past, that is, cinema brought us information about the worlds about us now, it seems, this role is for the most part entrusted to contemporary art.” The Radicant Lukas & Sternberg, 2009:31

pluralism in creativity - a dialogical expression of variety - creates a new vision. Hessian’s workshop, he suggested doesn’t solve problems but rather begins a dialogue through collaboration.

*The discussion featured the following comments:*

**Michael Walling** (Border Crossings) commented on the use of music as a successful methodology for lifting the gaze from the local. He contrasted it with the experience of Kabosh Theatre who found it both difficult and problematic to move out of the specific local and relate to a European dimension. He asked “how can we further the European dialogue in Northern Ireland?”

**Roisín McDonough** spoke of a wide spectrum of traditional music activity and engagement in Northern Ireland, there being both a shared common heritage as well as the fundamental divisions that Hession’s work is attempting to transcend in a European context. She reflected on how as a public authority, ACNI provides support to particular sets of traditions, which emphasise their exclusivity, e.g. encouraging parading bands to extend their repertoire and to articulate and develop a wider identity.

**Chris Torch** commented that there is a huge difference between the politicisation of art and art having certain political objectives. The co-option of art by political forces has often been a source of great frustration to those who did not have that intent. In Sweden, for example, he suggests that a small but growing xenophobia attaches itself to folk costume and folk dance, which were never created as political. Mr Torch urged that this will always be resisted suggesting that ACNI faced the challenge to encourage politicians to see how the arts can provide a complementary agenda to that of the political agenda. He commented on how “patriotic art” in Serbia is supported to glorify the State, and that politicians need to understand that this is an inappropriate utilisation of art and artists should self interrogate to ensure this is addressed.

**Naoimh Flannagan** (ArtsEkta) proposed that the politicisation of music was more an urban than rural condition where there were more cross-over traditions.

**EVALUATION**

The challenge of feeding back on matters as subjective as the arts proved to be additionally problematic for some participants who felt that the subtleties of the Northern Ireland context had not been picked up sufficiently by the external observers. **35.29% of respondents found the session good to excellent.**

communities in the refugee centre including those between camp residents on religious and ethnic grounds, between staff and residents, and between residents and the greater Maltese communities.
PANEL PRESENTATION

Overview of the Equality Landscape: The reasons behind the introduction of legislation and its impact on arts organisations

Moderator Rani Kasapi, Riksteatern, Sweden, with
- Roisin Mallon, Equality Commission Northern Ireland
- Dr David Hill, Crescent Arts Centre
- John Gray, Social Historian

Rani Kasapi suggested both Sweden and Ireland are peripheral communities with white majorities and both the conflict in Northern Ireland and the increasing and large refugee reception in Sweden necessitated intercultural strategies.

Roisín Mallon outlined the wide range of anti-discrimination legislation and equality legislation in Northern Ireland, which had only partly developed in response to European Union equality directives. She spoke of the obligations befalling service providers and that the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister will be consulting on extending legislation on age discrimination. Northern Ireland’s fair employment legislation imposes specific duties on employers with more than eleven employees to monitor their workforce, review policies, practices and procedures. And the concept of fair participation behoves them to address the reasons behind any discrepancies ensuring that if necessary any affirmative action is taken to address under-representation. Ms Mallon referred to Section 75 of Northern Ireland (1998) Act as a landmark piece of transformative legislation that mainstreams equality across the public sector. It means that public authorities must consider the impact of that policy on a range of nine equality grounds and furthermore, policy has to be impact assessed in terms of promoting good relations. The impact of Section 75 for the arts sector is that unlike anti-discrimination language which talks about avoiding discrimination, organisations are now obliged to proactively promote good relations and equality. Arts organisations have done this by encouraging participation from previously under-represented groups and consequently are able to report better organisational engagement with the voluntary and community sector. A review of Section 75 identified a tendency for it to become a tick box exercise,

---

46 Between persons of different religious beliefs, political opinions, racial groups, age, marital status and sexual orientation, between men and women generally, and between persons with and without dependants.
so a revised guide to public authorities asked them to focus on outcomes achieved for various equality groups and to develop an audit of inequalities and action plan. ACNI have done so and were commended by Ms Mallon for embracing it so well. ACNI have an existing wide range of strategies including an Intercultural Arts Strategy, the Arts and Older People Strategy and the Reimaging Communities Programme. An internally conducted survey of ACNI user groups and audiences indicates a high level of satisfaction with ACNI’s commitment to equality. Disability duties mean that public bodies must consider need to promote positive attitudes to disabled people and encourage participation in public life. Disability action plans, for example, are used by arts organisations to promote positive imagery as well as engagement. Arts, it was explained, can challenge opinions enabling people to express unique identities, connect communities, promote good relations and give a greater understanding of culture and identity. To ensure their compliance with obligations, the Northern Ireland Human Rights and Equality Commissions are also held to account by UN Committees.

The following contributions were made during the discussion:

**Naoimh Flannagan** asked how the Arts Council monitors black and minority ethnic community members’ experiences of the arts.

**Roisín McDonough** responded that ACNI adapt their approach to evaluation at programme level and rely heavily on arts’ organisations own evaluations as part of this process. ACNI encourage innovative ways to capture the impact and value of audiences’ narratives.

**Deidre McBride** (Community Relations Council) stated that there is a need for both the Arts Council and the Equality Commission to consider what the absence of a Government Racial Equality Strategy means for the participation of those from black and minority ethnic communities.

**Roisín McDonough** acknowledged that there is a lack of data on ethnic minority arts participation and that audits and action plans can only record successes when relevant monitoring data exist.

---

**Dr David Hill** (Chair Crescent Arts Centre) presented the history of Crescent Arts Centre which began as a school for women in 1873, re-opened as a youth resource centre in 1979 and subsequently developed into a focused arts centre. It underwent a £7 million refurbishment in 2010 and runs a programme of classes, workshops and performances. Annual programming provides over 40 rolling classes and workshops in

the spoken and written word, and the visual arts, and 19 music events, complementing a series of festivals and outreach programmes. The impact of equality legislation on that organisation is that it aspires to best practice in areas such as recruitment, staff training, venue facilities, signage and language. Equality of access and participation was important as a guide when the old, obstacle ridden building was converted and made accessible on all levels, whilst retaining the character and tradition through the façade. It also acts as a guide when addressing representation on the board, where minorities are at present still under-represented. Dr Hill acknowledged that tensions can occur between creative freedoms and equality regulation and legislation. The latter could for example, lead to (self-)censorship of the use of contentious symbols such as swastikas in performances and their marketing materials. Dr Hill also stated that it was hard to keep up with equality legislation of which there is so much in Northern Ireland.

**Dr David Hill’s presentation elicited the following responses:**

**Deepa Mann-Kler (Artist)** questioned whether statistics accurately reflect people with multiple identities or have an inherent tendency to homogenise identities.

**David Calvert (Kids in Control)** warned that arts organisations should not be forced to play a ‘numbers game’ in terms of their creativity suggesting that targets are not always in the best interest of creativity, performance and quality of experience.

**Rani Kasapi** drew attention to the fact that Sweden has fewer equality strategies and policies for the culture sector than one might expect, so it is left to arts organisations to develop their own indicators for equality strategies. She asked how arts organisations in Northern Ireland are monitored for their compliance with equality legislation.

**Bob Collins (Arts Council)** quoted Einstein saying “Not everything that counts can be counted” and suggested that we do not have the luxury of ignoring who is not availing of services. He suggested that it would be perverse if any equality guidance or legislation remotely compromises artistic freedom.

**John Gray**, former librarian at the Linen Hall Library, began his presentation by outlining the history of the Linen Hall Library, which has its origins in the formation of the Belfast Reading Society in 1778. Having been called “An institution that catalogues all our failures”, it took 221 years before a Catholic became its head librarian. He explained that it had been “dead easy to discriminate against Catholics” in Northern Irish

---

48 Crescent Arts Centre staff have benefitted from World Host Training. World Host Training services include workshops such as on “Customers with Disabilities” and “Service across cultures”. See [http://www.worldhosttraining.com](http://www.worldhosttraining.com) - accessed on 16.12.2012.
society as a whole, but that “the old glass ceilings have now shattered” – both for Catholics and for women. The ‘elephant in the room’, however, remained the divisions between social classes. He went on to say that “If sheer weight of paper could solve our inequality problems, we’d be in equality paradise.” Yet challenges remain according to Mr Gray: ACNI equality stipulations, for example, did not cover the composition of the boards of cultural organisations. Mr Gray also cautioned that “equality doesn’t guarantee great art” and that “dissenting art is bound to offend somebody”.

Deepa Mann-Kler commented on the closing of libraries and how they were often the most neutral venues in town, villages and cities and were key centres of communication for those from diverse backgrounds. She suggested that with these closures, the capacity to access cultural history is diminished.

Veronika Tóth (Hungarian Ministry of Culture) referred to the DICE Project (Drama Improves Lisbon Key Competencies in Education)49 and recommended its techniques.

EVALUATION

64% of those who evaluated this session found it good to excellent. There was some concern about the sleight of hand that can occur in the monitoring of equality issues with the suggestion that “data can conceal a multitude of tokenisms”.

THE ROLE OF THE ARTS AND THE CHALLENGES FACING NORTHERN IRELAND

Policy-making and Politics in Northern Ireland
Local Politicians share their views of the impact of local and regional arts.
Moderator Chris Torch, Intercult, Sweden, PIE Steering Group Member with

- Councillor Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, Sinn Féin
- Dominic Bradley MLA, Social Democratic Labour Party
- Chris Lyttle MLA, Alliance Party,
- Councillor Christopher Stalford, DUP – unable to attend
- Mike Nesbit MLA, Unionist Party – unable to attend

The politicians had been invited to:
- Share their views and experiences of the impact of local and regional arts
- Give their opinions on the role of the arts and the challenges facing Northern Ireland

Chris Torch introduced the session commenting on how knowledgeably the arts are spoken about in Northern Ireland; that they are not a marginalised activity, but seen as a central question by politicians.

He modulated the programmed questions as follows:
- Given the experiences and impact of local and regional arts would it be fair to suggest that the arts encourage people to engage in politics?
- Is conflict essentially cultural rather than economic and political? And if this is true what are appropriate responses?

Chris Lyttle (Alliance Party) recognised that the arts have a vital role to play in advancing multiculturalism, increasing active citizenship and civic participation as well as in education. The arts were central, he said, to Northern Ireland’s global tourism marketing campaign “Our Time, Our Place”. He reflected on the experience of large set piece events such as the Land of Giants50, Belfast’s Titanic Festival51, Derry City of Culture52, the Belfast Mela53 and the East Belfast Community Arts Festival54, and underlined that the Alliance Party supports such arts initiatives that celebrate diversity.

Mr Lyttle then displayed his familiarity with many arts events and the artists connected to them in his constituency, naming Leslie Cherry, Deidre Robb and Bronagh Lawson as contemporary visual artists addressing expressions of identity. He also commented on performance arts and spoken word artists featuring inter-cultural work. This included a recent Irish language documentary and play by Padraig Coyle, and the Community Play “The Baths”, by Prime Cut, which references the “Healing Through Remembering” discussions.

He referred to the T13 Dance Studio and a series of films about shared and intertwined histories. Mr Lyttle ended with reference to John F. Kennedy’s comments on Robert Frost\(^55\) “When power narrows the area of man’s concern, art reminds him of the richness of his existence” to suggest that government can do more to support the good work of ACNI in terms of its policy and funding and the Alliance Party are working toward that.

**Dominic Bradley** (SDLP) opened his comments by stating that the SDLP strongly support investment in the arts, both investment in arts infrastructure and in arts education. While there is an emphasis in Northern Ireland on the “STEM subjects” (Science, Tech, Engineering, and Maths), the SDLP would like to see the arts added so as to talk of “STEAM subjects”. The arts, he said, hold a mirror up to life in North Ireland, and while some still consider the arts to be an add-on luxury, there is plenty of evidence to show the “arts can wash their own faces” in terms of financing with a return of £3.60 for every £1.00 investment with over two thousand people employed through the arts. Mr Bradley spoke of his own commitment to the arts - being a keen amateur performer in English and Irish and having written two plays in the Irish language. The arts, he suggested play an important role in education, teaching teamwork, cooperation and the opportunity to explore difficult ideas, develop self-expression and confidence. There is great potential to bring pupils from different communities together through music, song and dance. Those children who are ‘hard to reach’ tend to enjoy and engage with the arts. In both urban and rural areas, the arts strengthen communities and improve their cohesion. Mr Bradley drew on a personal example of an inter-faith choir which he saw improving the mental health and well-being of participants noting that single identity arts initiatives are often only in existence because of geographical determination rather than desire.

He welcomed ACNI’s Intercultural Arts Strategy, recognising the cultural rights of ‘newcomers’ as well as longer established communities in the region. The arts, he suggested, provide opportunities to discuss difficult issues, however the arts shouldn’t be burdened with the onerous responsibility of solving all problems relating to sectarianism and racism. But yet they do have an important role to play in this through their creation of worlds where disbelief can be suspended and where we can take time out to have a

---

\(^{55}\) [http://www.arts.gov/about/Kennedy.html](http://www.arts.gov/about/Kennedy.html) - accessed on 25.11.2012
closer look at challenges personally or in conjunction with others. He suggested that the arts help us to think again, to bring tears and laughter and to leave us the richer for the experience.

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir (Sinn Féin) paid tribute to both the previous speakers’ work and to ACNI. He said the Arts Council have created a great degree of unity but to deliver more in ‘a still wounded society’ they need a better budget. He recognised that while politicians talk about art in monetary terms and that artists require more money, neither of these things would be the subject of his presentation. Rather, he focused on the healing power of art and the space it creates for recovery in a wounded society. He made reference to F.E. McWilliams’ series of sculptures, “Women of Belfast” (1972) in the context of the Abercorn bombing\textsuperscript{56} describing it as powerful as Picasso’s Guernica (1937), and to John Singer Sergeant’s “Gassed” (1919) with the capacity to create a dialogue space in which to create peace.

He suggested that there is no greater mission than to create peace, referring to the contemporary conflict in the Middle East. He made reference too, to the work of Conrad Atkinson - from its censoring in the 1970s to its incorporation into establishment art institutions in the 21st century - as an exemplification of the normalcy and ubiquity of peace that art can be a catalyst. Cllr Ó Muilleoir urged that we learn more from Europe through intercultural dialogue but also said that now that our war is over we need to exchange our learning with Europe to encourage artists elsewhere. He referred to the Irish motto captured outside the office of the Chief Executive of Belfast City Council, “We all live in each others’ shelter” and stated that this should be a shared belief of politicians and artists alike.

Chris Torch thanked speakers for their appreciation of the arts but asked why public arts budgets – that of the European Union in particular – remained, nevertheless, so small. What are the obstacles for political leaders in addressing this?

Dominic Bradley responded by drawing attention to a recent enquiry of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee into the arts. It had focused on both the digital revolution and traditional arts, and recognised the capacity of both to create wealth and wellbeing resources for society.

Chris Torch suggested that spending on the arts such as on music therapy needed to be considered in the perspective of costs such as policing parades. With more investment in positive artistic interventions other costs could diminish.

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir said what was needed in Northern Ireland were world-class arts initiatives which inspire citizens. With arts organisations struggling financially, it was a challenge for them to “get above the parapet to create”. He also appealed to arts organisations to “engage with working class constituents who support our political parties” – implying that parties would then have an easier time to justify arts investment. He spoke of the need to win the argument for particular arts projects and cited the Belfast City Council consultation process prior to the installation of the Wolfgang Butress sculpture “Rise” (2011) in south-west Belfast and the Belfast Festival at Queens, which both in his opinion remain irrelevant to working class communities.

Chris Torch summed the previous comment up as “the arts need to create votes”. He went on to ask, what might the European Union do in future to support a post-conflict Northern Ireland and what might the rest of Europe learn in return from Northern Ireland?

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir responded that Northern Ireland could learn a lot about multilingualism from other places in the EU, such as Cataluña or Finland. He jokingly added “we may not yet be good Europeans, but we remain old Europeans” and pointed to Ireland’s ‘export’ in 590 AD of the missionary Columbanus from Bangor Abbey who went to found a number of monasteries in continental Europe.

Dominic Bradley expanded on Mr Ó Muilleoir’s reference to minority and lesser-used languages suggesting that the European Union charter on minority languages helps us to realise there is no monolithic culture anywhere and that “each cultural part is to be valued in its own right”.

Chris Lyttle commented that local political parties have diverse views on European Union budget allocations in general, but that EU Peace and Reconciliation funds are gratefully acknowledged as having been supportive. He endorsed Sinn Féin’s position on the need to promote the arts within working class and impoverished communities.

Chris Torch urged politicians to see the region’s high quality arts as an ‘export item’ and to invest further in them.

Naoimh Flannagan (ArtsEkta) responded to the call for more engagement with working class people by pointing out how underfunded community arts are. The reality was that artists in that field earn less than the minimum wage. The gallery and studio spaces at the Conway Mill in West Belfast needed to rely on volunteers to raise money from private individuals, whereas public funding went into venues such as the Metropolitan Arts Centre (MAC). In addition, Intercultural Dialogue platforms were now a ‘trendy’ concept supported by government and arms length bodies, while communities who have been undertaking this work for years have not had the support they required.
Richard Huddleson (Green Party) picked up on the issue of multilingualism in Northern Ireland and said that sadly the Irish language was being used to exclude rather than to promote and enriching diversity.

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir acknowledged that language requirements could amount to gatekeeping, but that it needn’t be that way – as the successful use in Finland of Swedish, Finnish and Sami demonstrated. He said that besides Irish, the language of the Plantation, Ulster Scots, also needed to be protected and promoted. While languages and symbols have been politicised in Northern Ireland in the past, there is a clear move away from this. Mr Ó Muilleoir was encouraged to see an increase in the use of the Irish language by those from Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist traditions in East Belfast and referred to the Irish language theatre company Aisling Ghéarr, resident at Cultúrlann Macadam Ó Fiaich\(^57\), whose work is now firmly established on the schools’ calendar.

Chris Torch asked how multi-lingualism could be managed with newcomers to Northern Ireland: Which language(s) does one require them to speak?

Deirdre McBride noted that local councils have a role to play through their Good Relations offices in programming interculturalism so as to engage with communities and have their spaces utilised.

Dominic Bradley commented that some arts centres, including the Armagh Market Place, provide wonderful locations for first class arts programme and, like other shared spaces such as libraries, can provide a space for local council to engage with new communities. But equally, and exemplified by the Polish consulate, countries of origin must provide support to their people living in diaspora, as interculturalism is a two way process.

Chris Torch asked what the balance was between investment into shared and intercultural spaces and support to particular art forms in single identity spaces.

Dominic Bradley responded that in principle, venues should be open to everyone – it is problematical if art is quarantined into particular spaces. However, how mono- or multicultural spaces could be in practice depended on local demographics.

Katy Radford pointed out that advancing the intercultural agenda by arts initiatives rooted in small communities is often overlooked by funders and promoters. She drew attention to the “Jews Schmooze” initiative and its portfolio of music, spoken word performances and visual arts exhibitions working in English, Irish, Ladino and Yiddish, and highlighted that public arts funds are not employed to alleviate competition with and economic pressure on professional arts companies. Ms Radford went on to speak of the Good Relations work of Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich in reaching out to those from outside the Belfast Gaeltacht\(^58\).

Michael Walling (Border Crossings) pointed out that intercultural dialogue is foremost about creating spaces in which it is possible for diverse people to be who they are.

Chris Torch affirmed that the arts give people voices and people with a voice are active citizens.

\(^{57}\) An arts and cultural centre with a strong focus on Irish language and culture. See [http://www.culturlann.ie](http://www.culturlann.ie) - accessed on 17.12.2012.

\(^{58}\) The Irish speaking areas of Belfast.
EVALUATION

The principal concern to those evaluating this session was the lack of representation on the panel from Unionist politicians. One commentator from outside Northern Ireland described the session as ‘lively and informative’, whereas another lamented that ‘politicians stayed inside their party discourse.’ 25.8% of respondents considered this session to be good or very good.
CLOSING COMMENTS

Roisín McDonough concluded the Practice Exchange by stating that engagement with politics was no longer “a plague on all your houses”. Rather the willingness of arts professionals to speak to politicians and vice versa has increased. People now realised the importance of dialogue, and that trust needs to be built painstakingly over time. Ms McDonough stressed that it was important for the arts to remain contentious, ‘gubby’\(^{59}\) and wonderful even though this could cause discomfort. She said that people needed to be given the platforms and mechanisms for their voices to be heard, and encouraged the participants of the Practice Exchange to ensure that dialogue continues. Finally she commended the participants for the honesty and integrity with which they had contributed to the event.

RAPPORTEUR’S OBSERVATIONS: ISSUES MERITING FURTHER CONSIDERATION

One of the privileges of being a conference rapporteur comes when the role is not limited to summing up any plenary session or merely recording verbatim contributions of participants, but rather, as in this instance, it includes the opportunity to share reflections and to provoke further discussion. Platform for Intercultural Europe invited the rapporteur to provide comments to stimulate further discussion amongst members as to how any learning from the 6th Intercultural Exchange might inform future such events as well as policy development work locally and transnationally. The conference provided an opportunity for arts practitioners, statutory service providers and politicians to share their experiences of the role of the arts in post-conflict Northern Ireland. The change which local as well as trans-national intercultural and dialogical experiences can bring to communities was considered as both an opportunity and a challenge to practicing artists and those with whom they engage.

A legislative equality framework was shown to be providing a great guide to service planning and to stimulating the collection of research data and the definition of monitoring indicators. However, there is a danger that in focusing principally on quantitative measures, individuals and cultures who are most marginalised can disappear into a numerical vortex. Delegates were encouraged to reflect on the work of minority language activists throughout Europe and the qualitative benefits to individuals and communities of sustaining minority language revival. The small numbers of hate

---

\(^{59}\) ‘Gubby’: loud-mouthed, provocative, opinionated.
crimes reported in Northern Ireland does not indicate and indeed belies the brutality and traumatic impact of hate crime on small communities. Conversely, one artistic endeavour can become a key catalyst in the transformation and education of a whole community.

The role of the state and policymakers in setting the parameters for and determining the contributors to transformative artworks in communities was considered throughout the conference from a number of perspectives. Key recurring themes included those of engagement with and accountability to communities, authenticity, political and historical revisionism and the role of community brokers or gatekeepers.

A variety of artistic responses over time to the social and political context was presented. Delegates experienced myriad artistic shards, reflections and interpretations of individual and community perceptions. These emphasised multiple physical and projected realities of shared histories and contested imaginations. The catalogue of emotions exposed within the creation and audience of these works provided an opportunity to reflect on the glimpses of bold and intimate, raw and tender vignettes and synopses of artists’ work. It is regrettable but unavoidable that there was limited time to debate and explore the works more fully.

The tendency of policy makers and some practitioners to essentialise and homogenise communities by ignoring multiple ethnicities, allegiances, nationalities and diasporic growth was mooted. The role of gender, age and a relationship with the environment’s natural and manufactured resources, were considered in relation to the artist as an intercultural collaborator in communities. And finally, the artist’s role as an ethical interpreter, recorder and subverter of authenticity, tradition and ownership of events in the context of nation building and interculturalism was a conversation begun at conference, but nowhere near completed.
CONCLUSIONS

“Breaking away from narrow perspectives and embracing a wider culture”

The Intercultural Practice Exchange took place in the MAC a newly built city-centre venue. The conference provided an opportunity for practitioners, academics, the community and voluntary sector, statutory service providers and politicians to reflect on the role of the arts in the post-conflict development of Northern Ireland. Local participant Amos Greig embodied the challenge at the heart of the process when he described himself as “someone who came from an enforced narrow perspective ... seeking to break away and embrace a wider culture.” Practitioners from outside Northern Ireland were keen to see how the post conflict situation in Northern Ireland related to the situation in other European places such as the Balkans. Participants from Northern Ireland and abroad were keen to profile their own work and to sow the seeds for new international collaborations.

“Supporting the arts as an act of democracy”

The event was developed jointly by the Platform for Intercultural Europe (PIE) and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI). Roisin McDonough, ACNI’s Chief Executive, acknowledged it as an opportunity to advocate internationally for “the arts to be supported as an act of democracy.” The ACNI/PIE collaboration enabled an exploration of policy and legislative frameworks for equality in Northern Ireland, as well as programmes and projects for arts promotion cast in their context. Showcases for the latter were drawn principally from the portfolio of work supported by ACNI. They were considered in light of practices elsewhere familiar to participants from other jurisdictions.

From reconciling majority communities to recognising the complete spectrum of diversity

The comparative reflections revealed that ‘interculturalism’ – to the extent that it is a policy concept in Northern Ireland, has until recently focused exclusively on addressing the segregation of the two white majority communities - Protestants and Catholics - through intercultural initiatives. Unlike in other European regions, those from minority ethnic and faith communities brought by migration in particular have tended to disappear into a statistical vortex. Their contribution to the arts and to local as well as global interculturalism has tended to be invisible, and in some instances, silenced. Furthermore, the small numbers of hate crimes reported to the Police Service of
Northern Ireland (PSNI) do not reflect the traumatic impact on minority communities already living in a conflicted society with contested public spaces. Without their voices being heard, in this instance through arts practices, their sense of belonging remains at best ambiguous and begs the question, posed by Sabine Frank, PIE’s Secretary General, “is it people’s roots, their love of the place they live in, or the contribution they make to society which determines their perceived belonging?”

In responding to legislative and policy imperatives for equality - with good community relations at their core, post-conflict Northern Ireland emerges as a society where the hearts and minds of policy-makers and arts professionals alike are committed to enhancing collaboration and interculturalism in and through the arts. This commitment is crucial for the remaining task of opening up (sometimes still contested) cultural spaces to communities with roots outside the local and of making them more ‘user friendly’ to all members of civic society, while also paying attention to potentially unifying or divisive details such as minority language and landscaping.

The power to set arts agendas and its control

The role of the state and policy makers in determining the public arts agenda was considered throughout the event. Similarly, there were points made as to how those who are marginalised in communities (whether through age, gender, ethnic or national background) can be consulted or more adequately incorporated in discussions about public art in their communities. There was much discussion about the incorporation of those whose voices are silenced by gate-keeper political activists in the post-conflict environment. Also discussed was the control by and dependence on the state for determining which large-scale artistic show-pieces become representative of public art and art in communities.

The Practice Exchange briefly considered the attempts to ensure authenticity in the performance of social and political subject matter.

A field for more work: grappling with the diversity of diversity

The need for policy makers to guard against essentialising and homogenising communities and to recognise instead multiple ethnicities, allegiances, nationalities and diasporic growth (though often evident in artistic collaborations) was mooted. Likewise, the need was identified for artists as inter-cultural collaborators in communities to engage with a host of factors including gender, age and the environment’s natural and manufactured resources. A conversation was begun about artists’ role as ethical interpreters, as recorders and subverters of authenticity, of tradition and of the ownership of events in the context nation building informed by inter-culturalism.
ABOUT PIE’S INTERCULTURAL PRACTICE EXCHANGES AS A SERIES

Practice Exchanges for Intercultural Capacity-Building are an activity format of the Platform for Intercultural Europe which is based on the policy paper it elaborated through public consultation in the course of 2007/8: “The Rainbow Paper. Intercultural Dialogue – from Practice to Policy and back”60. This document contains four chapters of recommendations, which the Platform for Intercultural Europe put forward at the end of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008. The Practice Exchanges are designed to address the issues of the Rainbow Paper’s chapter II on building capacity for intercultural dialogue in (civic) organisations. This chapter makes recommendations on reviewing staff compositions and governance structures, serving constituencies, growing intellectual resources and advancing through comparison in a European perspective.

A number of Practice Exchanges have already taken place, each in collaboration with a local member of PIE:

- **In Malmö, southern Sweden on 15/16th July 2009**: This brought together professionals from artistic and cultural organisations from across the Nordic region. It was hosted by the Nordic Forum for Interculture.

- **In Vienna, Austria on 20/21st November 2009**: This brought together representatives from the cultural sector and from minority and migrants’ rights organizations. It was hosted by IG Kultur Österreich.

- **In Rome, Italy on 28/29th May 2010**: This brought together representatives from trade unions and other civil society organisations. It was hosted by the Italian Trade Union Confederation CGIL.

- **In Sidcup, London, UK on 15/16th December 2010**: This brought together theatre practitioners, arts consultants, anti-discrimination activists and academics to discuss the position of ethnic minorities in the arts in the United Kingdom. It was hosted by Border Crossings and the Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance.

- **In Ljubljana, Slovenia on 30th November/1st December 2011**: This brought together representatives from media training programmes for young Roma, youth community projects, protagonists in the debate on the building of Ljubljana’s first mosque and politicians at the time competing in national elections. It was organised in collaboration with Kud Pozitiv and Exodos Ljubljana, and hosted by the Municipality of Ljubljana.

Reports of previous Intercultural Practice Exchanges can be found on PIE’s website: [http://www.intercultural-europe.org/site taxonomy/bydate/intercultural-practice-exchange](http://www.intercultural-europe.org/site taxonomy/bydate/intercultural-practice-exchange)

**Basic Concept of Intercultural Practice Exchanges**

The core topic of Practice Exchanges is the intercultural adaptation of civic organisations to growing population diversity, which is a result of migration and/or the existence of indigenous minorities. However, depending on local specificities, intercultural project work, especially if it is conceived as a contribution to systemic change, can also be the subject of Practice Exchanges.

Given the Platform for Intercultural Europe’s political role in the EU cultural policy domain, we are particularly interested in relevant practice in the cultural sector, but especially where collaborations with other sectors are evident.

---

60 See [http://www.intercultural-europe.org/site/rainbow/about](http://www.intercultural-europe.org/site/rainbow/about)
The concept of Practice Exchanges recognises the urgent need to enable and facilitate dialogue about how different people and groups make sense of their experiences. This concept builds on the principle that intercultural dialogue is a democratic process that requires and enhances participants’ competences for democratic engagement. Furthermore, the Practice Exchanges reflect the obligations and aspirations of the European Union by valuing diversity and by seeking common solutions, which can be also adapted to local situations.