

The Impact of Cultural and Citizenship Education on Social Cohesion

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Input

Workshop 3

**Culture as a Means to Overcome Social Borders and Involve Socially
Disadvantaged Groups: Are Cross-Milieu Concepts and Co-operative
Projects Essential?**

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Some Lessons learned from the ‘BELONGING’ project

BELONGING is a trans-national youth media initiative, carried out and delivered between May 2008 and September 2009. It was designed to enable young people aged 15 to 19 to explore intercultural dialogue – grounded in the specificity of personal and social opportunities as well as in the challenges which arise around new kinds of migration and the making of new communities.

From working with young people from culturally mixed backgrounds in urban locations – in London/Newham, Lisbon suburb/Casal da Boba and Paris/20th arrondissement – the project organised a series of video workshops with key local partners. Focusing on migration-related topics, identities and the making of new communities, BELONGING explored how young people talk about belonging – how layered migrations shape communities, and how young people manage multiple, flexible identities while belonging to more than one place.

Working with creative video artists and film-makers – in small groups – the project led each young participant towards making his/her own film on a subject of his/her choice. The 43 short films which resulted from the workshops provide an interesting picture of today’s life and a valuable insight into the contemporary thinking of young people in city contexts in Europe. The objective was to deliver youth voices and perspectives on these major issues through video, and to ensure that these voices are heard by different audiences – their friends, the local community as well as mainstream audiences, institutions and policy makers. To this end, the project culminated in a variety of screenings and events – at local, national and international levels, combined with online showcases and TV broadcasts.

In addition, a round-table brought together young people from London, Paris, and Casal da Boba, at the newly opened French Museum La Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration in Paris, where they met, discussed and compared their different perspectives on ‘belonging’– using their films as a starting point for discussion. The round table took place during the final celebrations of 2008, The European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, and provided a unique opportunity for the young people to visit different exhibitions related to our topics, as well as attending a special screening of their films as well as a dance show.

BELONGING produced a number of outputs: DVD compilations with the films produced at the three locations with subtitles in English, French and Portuguese; an educational toolkit with activities and lesson-plans ‘A Cross-curriculum Learning Experience for Key Stage 3’, and a policy document ‘Belonging – Message to Policy Makers’ – available online in English, French and Portuguese.

BELONGING was devised and led by Manifesta¹, in association with the Runnymede Trust. It was supported by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the Equality and Human Rights Foundation, Portuguese Television RTP, Connect Youth, The British Council, La Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration.

¹ For more information on Manifesta, go to www.manifesta.org.uk

1. A summary of experiences

BELONGING was a wonderful experience:

- it was rich in experimentation – learning, adapting, reviewing; and also full of emotions of all sorts – tackling difficult issues, meeting new people, experiencing the pleasure of working as a team, being proud of the achievements;
- it started an intercultural dialogue, both amongst and across the adult teams involved in the project – via the trans-national element of the project, London, Lisbon/Boba and Paris – and of course amongst and across the young people, including the young people’s journey to Paris in December 2008;
- it contributed to improving the personal skills of the young people who took part in the project’s activities – the three workshops, the different screenings and the Paris round table – as well as developing the professional capacity of the adults involved in its process who facilitated the work.

BELONGING outputs and outcomes can be summarised as follows:

- 43 young people developed a greater understanding of belonging, community (including citizenship), diversity and equality, using film and local history and thereby became more confident members of their communities and active citizens within them;
- 43 young people acquired film-making and communication skills;
- 15 young people (to-date) had the opportunity to travel abroad to present their films and discuss their contents (different festivals in Paris and Amsterdam – and the Paris Round Table)
- 30 adults learned about European partnerships/exchanges and how to manage and practice cross-cultural and intercultural dialogue – trans-nationally, working with three country-locations and with young people from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. For some of the adult teams this project represented their first experience of working together with other European countries.
- 300 (minimum) teachers and youth workers are/will be better equipped to enable and foster discussions within formal and informal education settings about community, diversity, identity and equality, so that much more young people are/will be engaged in meaningful debate and discussion on these crucial issues².

Through previous projects, Manifesta found that young people do not only benefit from participating in a workshop; they also learn a great deal by seeing their work/films promoted, in front of different audiences – local, national, international – and interacting with those audiences. This is why the promotion and dissemination of the produced video works is so important.

By devising a variety of presentations and platforms – events/screenings, online showcases, broadcasts etc. – young people can share their views with others, and they can see that what they express in their video work is taken seriously.

The different screenings and showcases organised by the project had a multiplier effect in terms of impact, by reaching additional young people as well as the wider community and more general mainstream audiences.

² The project produced an educational toolkit with activities and lesson plans for Key Stage 3 (11-13 years’ old) focusing on Citizenship, History, Geography and English – as part of the English Curriculum. It is downloadable on <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/projects/belonging/teachers.html>

Various screenings were organised, in each of the participating capitals, both at community level and for a wider audience, including presentations with active participation of some of the young people at prestigious locations (such as the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum of Modern Art in Lisbon, Channel 4 in London):

Specific films were also selected and screened by film festivals and international competitions:-

- as part of the European Forum on Youth and Moving Image – a European festival organised as part of the European year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008, and held in Paris: two films were selected and the young film-makers invited to attend and present their films in front of a European audience;
- as part of the stranger festival in Amsterdam: a young participant from Paris was invited to attend the four days' festival, participating in workshops and in the Award Ceremony.
- as part of the UN Alliance of Civilisation (UNAoC) 'Plural + competition': two BELONGING films received an award, were screened at the UN Award Ceremony, and will now tour internationally in 2010/11 as part of a special package put together by the UNAoC.
- as part of the final celebrations of the European year of Intercultural Dialogue in Paris: six young people from Newham and six from Casal da Boba travelled to meet other young people from Paris who participated in the Belonging project. Watching each other's films, they discussed and compared their sense of belonging and the communities where they live. This round table took place at a new Museum in Paris, La Cité National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration.

The young people were also given a special tour of the Cite museum's permanent exhibition on immigration in France as well as other temporary video installations and a cross cultural dance show, specially created for the occasion. The Paris trip was also the occasion for a Paris screening with a selection of the young people's films, followed by a presentation prepared by a 'team' from each country, and introduced by UNESCO Director of the Division of Cultural Policies and Intercultural Dialogue (Katerina Stenou).

BELONGING was also showcased by Broadcasters, with some of the videos, on the BBC London website as well as the BBC Big Screen in Walthamstow – and Portuguese television RTP2, as project partner, is committed to screen all the films³.

2. The topics tackled – A synthesis of the content of the short films

The video work produced by the young people gives us an opportunity to look at society through the prism of 'youth' – and to listen to their favoured ways of talking about 'belonging'. Arguably, the best works engaged with the concept of 'belonging' but also challenged it. The young people used the opportunity to make works showing "how life is for them" – what they live with, rather than what they belong to; and to show the places and spaces they inhabit, as distinct from the spaces that belong to them.

Each of the films encapsulates a different approach and angle to 'belonging'. Although each local context at the three locations influenced the project and the subsequent video work produced, what we have learnt in the course of BELONGING is that the way young people feel is determined by different factors, ranging from intergenerational issues, male/female relationships, fear and danger in the streets, to the role of the police (especially in Paris) as well

³ For more information on *BELONGING*, please go to www.manifesta.org.uk and www.runnymedetrust.org/belonging

as many other facets of life. Having nothing to do and being bored is a recurrent topic appearing at all three locations; so too are issues relating to peer pressure and being influenced or manipulated by others.

Looking closely at the films, we see that:

- a number of the young people who took part in the BELONGING project seem to be disconnected from their families;
- when young people refer to community, they rather refer to community with young people (a community where adults do not really appear);
- the young people seem to face challenges in belonging to family and mainstream society;
- they are sceptical towards and suspicious of the way in which they are represented in the mainstream;
- they do not trust the representatives of the state: e.g. in France and Portugal we see a lot of suspicion toward the police;
- belonging is about much more than ethnicity and place;
- but the place the young people inhabit is very much the street and public spaces.

If we look at language, and in particular the words used by young people when discussing 'belonging', it is noticeably different from that of adults:

Language – words used by adults and policy people	Language – words used by the young people
belonging	Street
community	Home
Identity(ies)	Disillusion
Diversity	Together
Social cohesion	Neighbourhood
Social exclusion	Struggle/struggling
Violence	Hatred
Racism	Dignity
Equal opportunities	Friends
Citizenship	Difference

But young people also expressed themselves without using any spoken word in their film – simply using their creativity with images, sounds, music etc. and expressing their emotions poetically. Humour is also present in their films.

Below is a synthesis of the key themes and issues which emerged from each location.

London borough of Newham⁴

Young people in Newham took the notion of belonging literally, and focused on identity and diversity, although in some films they also relate 'belonging' to the neighbourhood and its diversity⁵.

Other topics explored included:

- issues that affect young people more generally, mainly because of their age – e.g. bullying, peer pressures, and how different schools/education (public/private) can lead to different outcomes;
- the relationship to the home country (and its implication with regard to belonging to one or more place);
- 'belonging' in a wider sense – such as the environment.

In 'Circling Around' Veronia Anandaraja uses her personal experience of migration and religious affiliations to define her own sense of belonging – that, ultimately, we are all part of a whole, regardless of the language we speak, our religion or our ethnic group. With three different religions – Buddhist, Hindu and Catholic – and through her multiple migrations, Veronia symbolises the capacity to develop a sense of belonging, regardless of where she lives.

In 'A taste of Asia' Rehana Siddique shows us where she lives, in Green Street in East London. For her, Green Street represents a symbolic meeting point of India and Pakistan – which coincides with her own origins. She demonstrates her attachment to community life, where people from various backgrounds share a space which they have made into a place of their own.

In 'Veins in a Body', Imran Jabber attempts to describe the process which makes new communities: accumulation of differently shared experiences, what he calls 'the good and the bad', leading to a sense of cohesion which overcomes differences. Starting with a poetic text, powerful images of Newham's diverse community is a poignant accompaniment to his words.

⁴ Newham is the poorest and most diverse borough of London. There are more than 30 different communities in the borough, and more than 300 languages are spoken. Newham has the lowest share of white population in London, with 61% of the population being drawn from mixed, Asian or Asian British, Black African, West Indian or Black British, Chinese, and other groups. The borough has the second highest percentage of Muslims in Britain (24.3%). In recent years, Eastern Europeans from countries who joined the EU have also settled there. In 2007, a Channel 4 television programme branded Newham the "4th worst" place to live in the UK. The study (which can be found on http://www.channel4.com/4homes/on-tv/best-and-worst/newham-3rd-worst-place-to-live-in-the-uk-08-06-05_p_1.html) took into account crime rates, school results, pollution, economic activity and property prices. The borough of Newham is going to be hosting the 2012 Olympics in Stratford, where an Olympic village is being built at present. Local people have, however, been concerned about whether this will bring long lasting benefit to the area and its inhabitants.

⁵ It is worth noting that a key characteristic of the London group is that a number of the young participants had only recently arrived in London – i.e. a few years ago.

Lisbon/Amadora – Casal da Boba⁶

In Casal da Boba, young people chose to talk about where they live – their neighbourhood – and how it differs from before; the specificity of their local context made the young Portuguese very much aware of how these changes have affected their lives and their sense of community.

It is interesting to note that several young people decided to express themselves through the use of music and dance – whether traditional, or not (e.g. rap, hip hop). Furthermore, although born in Portugal, most of them still use Creole (from Cap Verde) on a daily basis when communicating between themselves. This is reflected in their films.

Other topics appearing in their films are:

- social exclusion and the lack of opportunity for young people to succeed;
- the presence of strong peer support, often serving as a proxy for family (seen at times to be insufficiently supportive);
- intergenerational conflicts and the feeling that young people are being stereotyped by adults
- the police, which is seen as using disproportionate means/strength towards young people.

‘Saudade’, by Wilson “Icha” Teixeira, is a document on the transition from his old to a new neighbourhood – leaving the slums for specially built housing estates. What was lost and gained with the change is told by people from different generations, who also try to explain the feeling of nostalgia for the place where they have lived for many years and that they have suddenly left behind.

Ruben Furtado chose to challenge the police, in a simple interview on the street, led by two teenagers from Casal da Boba, near Lisbon. The questions asked reflect the teenagers’ worries about safety in the neighbourhood and a constant threat of police abuse. Their answers do not seem to leave the teenagers reassured.

Displaced from the neighbourhood where she used to live in the suburb of Lisbon, Brenda Semedo presents, in ‘O meu bairro’, the journey back home, to her old neighbourhood, where she was born and where her heart still is. With the sound of her violin, Brenda shows us the path to re-finding her community origins.

⁶ Casal da Boba is a neighbourhood located in Amadora, a city in the suburb of Lisbon. It is home to people whose families came from the Cap Verde Islands. The neighbourhood is composed of different groups but is not very diverse: in 2005, 63% of Casal da Boba inhabitants were of Cape Verdian origin, while 31% were of Portuguese, 5% of Angolan and Sao Tomé, and 1% Gipsy origin. Currently, low levels of education, lack of qualifications and therefore a high unemployment rate strongly affect the younger generation which constitutes nearly half the population of *Casa da Boba* (49% is between 0 and 24 years old). People from Cap Verde used to live in slums, but apartment flats with gas and electricity have now replaced the former improvised houses. For a long time, city development was non-existent in these areas, making lack of electricity and deficient sanitation/sewage systems problems of the inhabitant’s everyday lives – reinforcing the bonds that linked the inhabitants to each other, as neighbours and exiles. When the land where *Bairro de Fontainhas* and its surrounding neighbourhoods were reclaimed by its owners, the local authorities created a relocation programme for all its inhabitants. In 2002, most were relocated to *Casal da Boba*, a new purpose-built development. As the families moved into new buildings and flats, their lifestyle changed dramatically from that in their old neighbourhoods and that of Cape Verde: the tower block flats in which they were re-housed had closed doors which kept them apart and more isolated from each other

Paris 20ème arrondissement⁷

In Paris, the young people chose to tackle how they live – and the difficulty of their lives. In this context, many young people decided to tell a story which relates to their lives and their sense of alienation. Most of these stories are centred on relationships with others – friends, lovers, adults, parents etc.

Key narratives of ‘belonging’ in their films feature:

- ordinary daily racism, faced by young people of Black and North African origin;
- young people’s stereotyped, intergenerational misunderstandings;
- friendship and family tensions;
- mistrust of institutions and in particular the police, seen as violent and racist;
- impact of immigration policies on young people’s lives (e.g. deportation);
- other general issues affecting young people (e.g. peer pressure, violence, smoking).

Ngoné Hajjar, a young Black woman, sees her own sense of belonging as being daily threatened in the Paris metro by racism and hostility expressed by some white French people. She makes, however, a strong statement as to her presence in Paris: she is ‘Here to stay’ – the film’s title.

In ‘Un jour de plus’, Yacine Mamouni sets out with humour on an ordinary day in life in a Paris suburb, where two young people chat, phone, wait for their friends... kill the time with humour. This film symbolises the lack of opportunities for young people in marginalised areas.

‘Au coin de ma rue’ directed by ‘Elhadj Sidibé, shows how young people living in housing estates occupy their time, in the street. We follow them as they encounter ‘outsiders’ visitors’ looking for drugs to buy, the police -- patrolling the neighbourhood, and other characters who happen to cross their lives.

⁷ *Belleville* still is an area of Paris that many migrants first come to, upon their arrival, hence the great cultural diversity and the social fragility of the area, as job opportunities are low, financial means precarious and social exclusion pronounced. *The Amandiers* neighbourhood is emblematic of these issues. As older housing was replaced by tower blocks and social housing estates at the beginning in the 1960s, 40 years of successive urban reconstruction have had the effect of closing this neighbourhood in on itself. The vast majority of families living there are from an immigrant background (North African, West African and, more recently, Asian) with a higher proportion of foreign born and migrants than the Paris average. *The Amandiers* has been portrayed as a ‘sensitive’ neighbourhood by the local authorities and the media. In June 2007, 25 years’ old *Lamine Dieng* died during a police intervention in the area. Following his death, demonstrations by local residents angrily criticized the police’s practices and violence in the neighbourhood. The event and its aftermath reinforced the feeling of exclusion and social difficulties which young people of migrant descent in urban areas have experienced in France.

4. Overcoming social borders through culture – how ‘Belonging’ took up the challenge

As part of the project’s process:

The workshop process – out of school, meeting, working and interacting with other young people and adults, most of them new to them – has shown how beneficial these exercises are.

- using film and video as a creative means of expression to tackle difficult issues is great for young people to express their feelings and emotions and articulate their thoughts - differently from school, for example;
- each young person learned to work in small groups, as well as formulating his/her own idea for their films. Individual work combined with group work led to the production of 43 short films; this means that each of the young people produced his/her own video work on ‘belonging’;
- these young people, most of them marginalised or alienated, with few opportunities, come out of the experience with more self-confidence and more sophisticated. They all have developed a strong sense of self esteem, having been taken seriously by the workshop facilitators and seeing the tangible output that they produced – their films, and associated events;
- the entire experience provides recognition and legitimacy for them.

More generally, the different activities which were included into the project (the workshop, the screenings, the round-table, the festivals etc.) have helped the young people to tackle and sometimes overcome a number of cultural and social difficulties:

Within their own communities:

- through their filming: improved adult/children/young people communication (with the team of facilitators, but also with local adults who were asked to act in some films or were interviewed by the young people);
- also, when presenting and showcasing their films to their local communities, which included adults.

Cross milieu:

- the workshops and the screenings were an opportunity to make them leave their neighbourhoods, each presenting his/her film in the centre of Lisbon, at the Museum of Modern Art; or at Channel 4 in London, including some of them travelling abroad.
- we discovered, for example, that some young people from Boba had never been to the centre of Lisbon and were afraid to go there (as much as the middle class is afraid of going to some inner city areas). That was an occasion to overcome this fear.

Cross-country and nationalities:

- travelling to Paris to attend the round table and/or to international festivals, when nominated.
- experiencing intercultural dialogue ‘live’ with others – both for adults, project teams and young participants.

6. Conclusion – Assessing the effectiveness and impact of ‘Belonging’ as a cultural intervention

It must be stressed that the Manifesta approach to organising and delivering BELONGING paid much attention to carefully identifying and selecting local partners and professional animators – with an established record of working creatively ‘on the ground’ with young people in their communities.

The Manifesta approach to BELONGING would suggest that: (a) given the opportunity to address serious issues and to express themselves imaginatively - carefully thought out and professionally supported (i.e. adequately financed, resourced and animated), and (b) given the encouragement to express themselves imaginatively and using new, youth friendly media – the resulting work(s) can be spectacularly successful, in ways that the participants (young people as well as animators/facilitators) might not have imagined to be possible.

Finally – the BELONGING video-work(s) have clearly proven to be of interest for a wide range of agencies and purposes, as indicated in the opening section of this report – from local communities and special youth and media fora to international policy institutions like UNESCO and the UN Alliance of Civilisation. And the videos serve as useful educational tools at schools.