**Maurna Crozier
interviews
Dragan Klaic**

Interculturalism

How to build an inclusive cultural space

Artist: **John Byrne,** *Title:* **Dublin's Last Supper, 2004**

How to build an inclusive cultural space

Dr Maurna Crozier, former Director, Cultural Diversity Programme, NI Community Relations Council interviews Dragan Klaic

In the late 1980s the all-pervasive *'two traditions'* model of Irish society was being widened, mainly to be more inclusive of the variety of economic, social, gender and age differences which it failed to articulate. It gave way to the more generic *'cultural traditions'* which aimed to give a wider and more benign description to the great religious and political divisions for which Ireland was best known – but which was inaccurate almost as soon as coined, since it did not easily include the incomers bringing different cultural traditions to Ireland by the 1990s. *'Multi-cultural'* was then generally adopted as the easiest description of the new society which lived in Ireland, though in the north of Ireland *'cultural diversity'* was the working term, since it incorporated both the malign divisions which were still evident and aspirations for the tolerant diversity which were shared with all of Europe.

Artist: John Byrne, Border Interpretative Centre, 2000

While 'multi-cultural' always had the limitations of 'separate development' assumptions, cultural diversity was more realistic in including a range of ethnic, faith and ideological communities, and in addition was included in the criteria for many arts, heritage and cultural programmes, with the intention of making them inclusive of the many people who are resident on the island of Ireland.

But just as the European – and indeed international norm – becomes familiar here, it is being challenged as a limiting and static term by Dragan Klaic: ∗

Although he recognises the strength of English as a useful shared language, he criticises both the European Commission, and the EU member states, for doing very little to promote multi-lingualism which he sees as essential in order to build Europe as an 'inclusive cultural space'.

'Cultural diversity is not a panacea, and contains a high risk of 'here' and 'there'', of absorbing notions of difference and perpetuating them. With intensive use its meaning has become 'polluted', through use by the cultural industries, and as a lever for support for 'cultural exceptions'.

Artist: Jesse Jones, Drive in Cinema 2006, photo by Hugh McElveen

Artist: Seamus Nolan, Hotel Ballymun, 2007

'Cultural diversity is a bit passive', according to Klaic. The term which he prefers in the pursuit of inclusivity, and which he finds 'much more engaging and proactive than 'cultural diversity'' is *'intercultural competence'*. This, he says is, 'an attitude, a mentality and a skill, which enables me to interact with people who are a bit different but (with whom) I have a lot in common: our humanity, which we can recognise and share, and a skill, which enables me to act with others with curiosity and respect and with the feeling that I will be enriched.'

Klaic is antagonistic to and challenges the search for 'identity' which characterised much of European academic and popular dialogue in the late 20th century and early 21st century, as he sees it as being neither constructive or productive, since when one starts with identity one is immediately trying to alienate:

'The question 'who I am' is boring: the question 'who I might become' is interesting, so I try to avoid all the identity searches which are self-limiting and curtailing and try to draw a line between 'me, us, we' – and 'others'. When we start with identity it (leads to) stasis and limitation, and it does not recognise social and cultural change.'

What a relief that is to the Irish-Identity Conference weary; we can be what we feel, or aspire to in Ireland now, and share that aspiration with a genuine European like Dragan Klaic. What a liberation. For Klaic maintains firmly that 'we have more in common than what separates us'. While culture can be a barrier, it is not insurmountable, and intercultural competence helps us.

While at a personal level – always the starting point – this involves effort and skills (presumably linguistic ability might be one of these), intercultural competence in a cultural or arts organisation can be 'orientation, strategy, policy and philosophy. Ideally it will be part of institutional development at several levels.' While all individuals need to work on their own competencies, it also needs to be a feature at 'leadership and board levels, and with staff, associated artists and so with the public.' 'In the theatre, to achieve intercultural understanding in the auditorium, it needs first to be on and behind the stage.'

Unsurprisingly, he asserts that he is definitely not talking about the tokenism of a multi-ethnic work-force, but of an inclusive developmental philosophy in cultural organisations, and he cites many good examples of interculturalism – in museums, festivals and theatre: a performance by two dancers 'Pichet Klunchun and Myself' which premiered in Bangkok, then toured Europe, (including Project Arts Centre, Dublin in 2006 as part of the International Dance Festival) 'provoked and delighted'; the exhibition in Amsterdam of photographs taken by children on their return to Morocco for holidays, illustrating their 'double existence' through 'what strikes their gaze as different when they go there'; and an exhibition of emblematic objects chosen by the multi-ethnic residents of a city, through which they recreate cultural continuity as 'new' residents.'

One of the Reports to which Dragan contributed (1) referred to 'vulnerable cultural forms' which were nevertheless capable of 'dynamic intercultural involvement', and I asked him if he could elaborate on this – with relation to one of our public art forms in Ireland, memorials, and one of our best-known traditional activities, story telling. Proving he is much more than a theoretician, he suggested that an international artist doing an art work inspired by a monument was a 'very interesting experiment,' and that story-telling was 'an art form which could pop up in other media and could easily be re-cycled to other forms, with digital culture'.

'From Moscow to Dublin there is cultural convergence as similar needs, concerns and dilemmas need a policy response. Cultural policy is increasingly the matter of cities and regions, and (there is) a great deal of diversity in solutions, (with) cities finding their own ways to deal with their urgencies'.

It is these urgencies, in his most compelling view, which can best be addressed by increasing our intercultural competencies.

Who wouldn't raise a glass to that?

(1) Final Report of the Reflection Group of the European Cultural Foundation 2002-2004

Dragan Klaic will be a keynote speaker at the Public Art Symposium hosted by **Create** *in association with Leitrim County Council Arts Office, at The DOCK, Carrick-on-Shannon, Sept 13/14. For details visit: www.create-ireland.ie*

Irish Fundraising Handbook, 6th edition

The sixth edition of the indispensable voluntary sector resource, the *Irish Fundraising Handbook*, is published in October 2007 by **Create**, in association with The Wheel and Clann Credo (Social Investment Fund), and with financial support from the Citizens Information Board.

The 6th edition provides a comprehensive directory of funding sources and also outlines the law governing fundraising, explaining the impact of the new Charities Regulation Bill.

The Handbook is available from **Create** for €20, plus €3 p+p. To order a copy email fh6@create-ireland.ie

RISK – Create Think Tank in association with OUT OF SITE

Create was delighted to host the second event in our new **Create** Think Tank series at the Odessa Club, Dublin on August 24, with participating artists – LIGNA (Germany), Carole Lung (USA), Fergus Byrne (Ireland), Aileen Lambert (Ireland), Sandra Johnston (Northern Ireland). Chaired by Áine Philips RISK questioned the relationship of audience and artist and the management of uncertainty in live art. The audio will be made available on www.create-exchange.ie, our forthcoming audio site to facilitate public debate on the role of arts and culture in Ireland.

Create in association with the Leitrim County Council Arts office to host Symposium on Public Art

VENUE: The DOCK, Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim
DATE: Sept 13-14, 2007

Create and Leitrim County Council Arts Office are hosting a symposium to discuss future directions in public art. Focusing on themes of Dialogue as methodology and intercultural competence; and Ritual as collective cultural memory, the symposium will challenge conventions about public art and offer insights into practices, projects and outcomes.

Major national and international speakers including David A Bailey, Susan Kelly, Dragan Klaic and John Fox will take part. Presenting artists include Gary Keegan and Seamus Nolan; Vivienne Dick and Aileen Lambert; Jesse Jones and John Byrne; Sarah Browne and Fearghus Ó Conchúir.

To book, find out costs (individual and organisation) or to register interest, telephone Liz or Michelle at the DOCK on 071 9621694 or email admin@thedock.ie

Choreograper and Concept: Fearghus Ó Conchúir, Director: Dearbhla Walsh,
Photographer: Aidan Kelly, Performers: Matthew Morris and Fearghus Ó Conchúir.

Artist in the Community Scheme Second Round 2007

Create manages the Artist in the Community Scheme on behalf of The Arts Council. The second round selection panel members were: Willie White, Project Arts Centre, Dominic Campbell, Bealtaine and Abbey Talks, Dermot Bolger, writer, Gemma Tipton, arts critic, Lucina Russell, Kildare County Council arts officer and Rhona Byrne, artist.

Successful applicants for Round Two in 2007 were:

Phase 1 – Research + Development Awards (artist and community, artform)

Con Horgan, Kerry Groups Communities Project, circus arts; Claire Feeley, market vendors, Dun Laoghaire, film/mixed media; Dominic Thorpe, Finglas Youth Resource Centre, visual arts; Ivan Connolly CAFTA (Community & Family Training Agency), visual arts; Martin Vernon, Brothers of Charity Ennis, drama.

Phase 2 – Project Realisation Awards (community, artist, artform)

Brothers of Charity, West Clare & Paddy O'Connor, film; Sustainable Projects Ireland & Sally Starbuck, ecological architecture; Kildare Town Youth Project & Glenn Loughran, visual arts; Mosney Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre & Anne Kelly, architecture; Ronanstown Youth Service & Ríonach Ní Néill, dance.

For further information on the Scheme and 2008 deadlines contact Katherine Atkinson, 01-4736600, or email support@create-ireland.ie