



Tuesday, 4 October 2011, 1:30 pm.

### **Roundtable 3: Rebuilding Communities**

#### Speakers

**Maria Victoria Alcaraz**, Managing Director, San Martin Cultural Centre, Buenos Aires

**Komi Tublu**, Managing Director, Ecole du Patrimoine Africain, EPA, Benin

**Pilar Kasat**, Managing Director, Community Arts Network, Western Australia (CAN WA)

#### Moderator

**Elise Huffer**, Cultural Advisor, the Secretariat of the Pacific Communities

#### Rapporteur

**Annamari Laaksonen**, Research Manager, International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA)

### **Description of the session**

This session focused on the intersection between arts and culture and communities facing particularly difficult times from natural disasters to postcolonial situations.

**Maria Victoria Alcaraz** talked about the role of art managers in rebuilding a community including its sense of a cultural identity after been through deep crises such as natural disasters, emphasizing that the cultural sector should be considered as a professional one in which adequate training, information flow and exchange of experiences are vital. She explained how after seeing footage of the earthquake and tsunami in Chile on 27 February 2010, she began thinking about what kind of assistance cultural professionals could provide to colleagues in Chile and other areas facing similar situations. In Chile her colleagues indicated that they had lost all their files, documents, contact information (apart from infrastructure) and that they would have to start from scratch. Hence the idea of developing a cultural first-aid kit as a means to provide guidelines, institutional information, contact database and so forth – all the kind of information which is needed to assist, regroup and rebuild after such disasters.

The Cultural first-aid kit comes in the form of a digital platform, a work-in-progress that enables cooperation between cultural professionals facing these issues. It is being developed through a network of 200 Latin American cities in six countries.

**Komi Tublu** talked about a project focusing on the promotion of local food preparation in the *Batammariba* a region divided by the border between Benin and Togo where living conditions are harsh and where there is poverty but where traditional housing and food preparation are tourist attractions. The region is host to a World Heritage Site (Koutammakou) on the Benin side but up till now there had been little community implication in the site. The project is therefore designed to integrate the local food and culinary culture of the communities so that local communities would benefit more from the tourists visiting the site, and through tourism foster local development and the fight against poverty. Komi described how the project generates activities at all levels of the value chain from production to commercialization in a participatory and collaborative way, and generates benefits, revenues, income and increases the level of life for local populations (including increased economic autonomy for women) at individual and collective level.

**Pilar Kasat** talked about the work of CAN WA in engaging communities in Western Australia. She focused on a project carried out in Narrogin where the Noongar people, experienced a spate of youth suicides in 2008, which left the community in a deep state of grief. CAN WA brought in artists to the community including photographers, theatre workers and musicians to assist to creatively and sensitively unpack what were the key issues and to begin creating a 'new narrative' with the community. CAN WA worked closely with the Elders and after 12 months the community created a photographic book and a 'soundscape' featuring their hopes for the future. This soundscape was launched at a community event attended by the whole community and heralded, as a much needed healing event. Since then CAN WA has continued the work with the community in order to foster a sense of belonging and identity. Pilar stressed that developing relationships and trust in the community was critical and employing Noongar people was pivotal to its success. Pilar also mentioned that the project was funded by arts and non-arts sources through the development of partnerships.

The main question posed by the three speakers was the role of cultural agents – what can and should cultural agents do in the face of difficult situations such as natural disasters and complex situations that communities go through? What came through strongly was that all the projects focused on improving people's situations and therefore demonstrate the emphasis on empathy, solidarity and bringing hope as a common factor. All demonstrated that what is required is to build on existing community knowledge, whether professional community or people themselves in creative ways. In the general discussion the audience shared examples of gastronomy as a tool for cultural tourism; best practices in different sectors of community work; and spoke about the practical dimensions of cultural work in natural disaster sites; the effect of environmental changes in the livelihoods and culture of the communities; the self-trust of local communities in their own cultural 'attractiveness'; the necessities of local communities to know what this is really about and the role of community workers in responding to crises

## Creative intersections discussed in the session

- Cultural first aid-kit: Network of 200 cities in six countries that form part of a network that use the digital content of the cultural first-aid kit to reinforce their cultural management plans in situations of crisis.
- Culture and tourism as a motor for local development and a tool to fight against poverty
- The importance of traditional knowledge through the value-chain and as an engine for change
- Social cohesion as a result of community work (such as in Africa) and the revitalization of the cultural identity
- Dialogue of cultural workers with professionals from other sectors (specially community workers)

## Examples of good examples and practices

- Development project on heritage and culture as means for development funded by the African School of Heritage (mentioned by Komi Tublu)
- Creation of cultural bank (a fund) that people can sell their products and receive micro-funding (idea) (Komi Tublu)
- Photography project of Community Arts Network that brings out a new narrative (Pilar Kasat)
- Public art project of the Community Arts Network with the Noongar community – playing cards used to be a collective activity in the community and therefore the CAN used cards to encourage the community members to write their messages. These included phrases such as *'it's here in my heart'* and *'it's time to let go and move on'*, *'when you come to the ancestors, we're all related somewhere along the line'*. It's about people developing the new narrative. (Pilar Kasat)
- Royal Children's Hospital – art and mental health project in communities (mental health, education, arts) (by audience member)  
First-aid kit: networking, identification of needs and solutions through the network (Maria Victoria Alcaraz) [www.botiquincultural.org](http://www.botiquincultural.org)

## Identified problems

- Very strong post-colonial tensions in Africa and Indigenous/Aboriginal communities
- Aboriginal people's living conditions (affected by colonial issues that bring in different social problems from health to unemployment etc.) which require all of government solutions
- Question: Do communities need to go through difficult social situations (such as suicides of the aforementioned young men) for the government or other actors to take notice?
- Lack of interest on the government's part (culture can achieve many things but it is not achieved until embedded in policies)
- Many projects do not receive resources from arts funding but from other sources (such as community work)

## **Recommendations for future actions**

- Agreed public policy initiative: *'To inspire and mobilize people into action through holistic and long-term projects that draw on local knowledge and expertise in consultation with the communities to ultimately embed them into cross-sectoral policies since no policy can be consistent without trust, local support and consultation, and to combine multiple methodologies and approaches including art in order to seek for structural and long-lasting change.'*
- Finding long-lasting solution (not only putting band aids in the system) There is a need for a radical change (structures, policies, mentalities)
- Artists and art methodologies should be used in all sectors
- Multiple solutions and methodologies should be used in all sectors

## **Other additional comments**

- Inclusion of new themes in the final version of the Discussion paper (culinary art and culture; etc.)