

# **Diversity in the Arts: Perspectives and Challenges of the Production of Art & Architecture**

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This batch of papers are the output of the first year of SUS.DIV research.

# **Diversity in the Arts: Perspectives and Challenges of the Production of Art & Architecture**

## **Summary**

This case study is an urban regeneration scheme in Belfast, one that was built on the historical success of the shirt industry in Derry with the intention to harness the iconic buildings capacity to overcome the divisive visual perception of the built environment. The paper examines how the two communities in Northern Ireland visually perceive their shared built environment and the extent to which architecture can access or create a blending of such visions, thus instilling a sense of symbiosis among the communities. The context of the paper is the explicit cultural frame, which appears to impact on decisions in the design and implementation of urban regeneration schemes and architectural design in Belfast. By asking whether the culture concept has indeed a role to play in the design and building of contemporary architecture in Belfast, what it pertains to do, but actually does, this paper calls for the rethinking of our assumptions surrounding the question of how diversity is to be managed in order to be sustained.

**Keywords:** Arts, Architecture, Diversity, Belfast

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**Diversity in the Arts:**  
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**An Introduction**

**Hisham Elkadi and Susanne Küchler**

“Cultural diversity” has emerged as a leading concept in the arts funding system, backed by Action Plans and national and international declarations. The *UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, which was adopted unanimously on November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2001 in Paris, sets out the agenda for future research and policies with its statement: “The cultural wealth of the world is its diversity in dialogue.” Cultural diversity here is defined as a ‘living, and thus renewable treasure’ and as a capacity for expression, creation and innovation. The Universal Declaration makes it clear that cultural plurality and cultural dialogue sustain each other in a mutually reinforcing manner.

This UNESCO declaration, however, is not without problems. Its definition of ‘culture’ and of the role of the ‘arts’ is as broad and unwieldy as those used by National Councils; this is, because it reaffirms what has been taken for granted all along, namely that ‘culture should be regarded as a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.’ As general guidelines for inter-cultural dialogues as the guarantor of peace set up against the background of 11 September 2001, the UNESCO Declaration does therefore not, arguably, add a substantially new direction to a concern with cultural diversity that has preoccupied Arts Councils in some places, such as Britain, already for some 25 years.

These shortcomings of the declaration betray a stagnation in our understanding of the subject of diversity and of the role played by cultural dialogue in shaping how diversity is articulated and managed in society. There are in the main two distinct perspectives on diversity in cultural dialogue: The first perspective maintains the line of what we will call the ‘ethnicization’ of culture, calling for the continued assertion

of beliefs and practices that grounded in a ‘homeland’, irrespective of how distant or even imaginary these have become to transnational cultures; the second perspective follows the integration agenda within European contexts, and argues for the need to support innovations in tradition that born out of living in conditions in which diverse cultures come to share both the assets and goals directed at securing a better future. While generalizing what in fact are highly nuanced inclinations, these two perspectives influence much of the decisions that regulate funding in the arts, from music and artistic performances, to the production of public places, and which influence their articulation across the media.

Both perspectives on diversity in cultural dialogue are subscribing to a culture concept, which takes ethnic criteria to be a given and unproblematic factor in the fashioning of identity, and which ignores that contemporary societies have complex networks of interests among different constituencies that are notoriously difficult to map. Taking the UNESCO declaration as an expression of a culture concept at work in our thinking about diversity, one can note that it appears to acknowledge the complex picture of identity emerging from within the spaces and creative expressions of cities today, but that it also ignores the fundamental complexities brought about by the impact of diversity itself on the production of arts. References to ‘cultural mosaic’ are repeatedly mentioned in the UNESCO declaration, projecting hybridity as a quasi ‘natural’ outcome of a mixing of cultures, which is owned by all. The declaration thus avoids the difficult question of how diversity regulation at work at the institutional and cultural level is itself impacting on emerging local networks and identities. The current trends in funding which reflect the ideas born out in the declaration thus also neglect to consider the emerging socio-economic patterns of ownership and value which are extended to cultural productions at all time, whether culture is consciously produced as ‘diverse’ or not.

The essays in this book have been produced by researchers with diverse background sharing an interest on advancing the role of diversity in building communities. The essays are varied in their scope and in the depth of exploration of the role of cultural diversity in the production of arts and architecture, a fact which reflects varied experiences at the ‘coalface’ of arts production that are not usually brought together with more theoretically inspired perspectives. Taken as a whole, the essays included

in this book highlight the shortcomings of the declaration of cultural diversity and current trends in arts funding through case studies which carefully blend out what happens when arts funding targets perceived 'ethnic art', while ignoring its production as an ethnically 'blind' commodity intended at crossing borders. Norris, for example, shows the impact of production of cloth by Asian groups for predominantly West African consumption. While the production of such beautiful cloth can be seen as enriching the diversity of London's cultural landscape, it thrives only as long as its ethnic identity remains covert in transactions that fuel the socio-economic exchanges of transnational communities. Reporting from Gujarat in India, the bedrock of plurality and lived diversity, Patel draws similar conclusions from her study of what happens when Hindu folk-music, which thrives without patron or fixed context, is transported into the art music performance space in Gujarat's cities that was traditionally dominated by Muslims. When ethnic identity is rendered overt in the marketing of arts, tension ensues, followed by the ghettoization of the arts and a dwindling of creative capacity, irrespective of any change in the arts itself. The positive working of a covert identity is the theme of another paper, which describes one of the most successful projects of performance art in the 'new' post-conflict Belfast. "Space Shuttle", a project initiated by Peter Mutschler of PS', was a portacabin module used by a diverse range of interdisciplinary artists, initiatives and community groups to operate as 'platform for urban creativity and social interaction' and 'to produce new and site-influenced work.'

The essays in this book trace not just the stories of the success and failure of cultural dialogue promoted by diversity inspired funding, but also the stories, which capture the post-reporting stage of funding when research attention is diverted to new sites. In taking a more comprehensive view of the impact of diversity inspired funding on the arts and on the communities, whose relations unfold in the vicinity of the arts, the essays assembled here try to go beyond the scope of existing studies of diversity in cultural dialogue, most of which are reports of funding initiatives aimed at sustaining cultural diversity. In the rush to attract funding to the arts in cities where cultural diversity became evident in daily life, existing research projects have markedly fallen short of both rigor and scope. Research rarely defines what has been labeled as "the arts" in the same way, and often the same study will include diverse activities and organizations, while making hypotheses of impact that are based on frequently

contradictory and unexamined assumptions of what constitutes the ‘social’ basis of cultural diversity and what constitutes a measure of arts impact (Guetzkow 2002; Jermyn & Desai 2001; Jermyn 2001). It is striking to note how quickly research sidestepped the question whether the arts indeed have a beneficial impact, and turned the question of its comparable impact in relation to other competing programs such as sports or education. While paying lip-service to such a comparison, research has so far to produce data in support of such a comparison., nor have economic impact studies of the arts been systematically compared across social contexts (Breschi & Malerba 2001; Guetzkow 2002). In short, one cannot help but describe current research on the arts which is carried out in the spirit of sustaining ‘diversity in dialogue’ as unregulated and based on under theorized hypotheses and ill-defined variables subjected to one-sided methodologies is an understatement.

The recommendation by the Arts Council of England in its *Cultural Diversity Action Plan* (Arts Council of England 1998) that is currently being implemented is that arts funding should address barriers to equity by concentrating on four key principles: diversity; advocacy; access; and development. Eighteen policy action teams were created to forward work in key policy areas such as the arts and sports, designed to engage people in poor neighborhoods, particularly those who may feel excluded, such as disaffected young people and people from ethnic minorities to “connect with the mainstream” and thus to regenerate communities by “valuing diversity”. By projecting access to the mainstream via attending arts events and institutions as a ‘good thing’, research has focused on a range of practical and psychological ‘barriers’ to improve access, measured in terms of attendance (Jermyn 2001; Jermyn & Desai 2000). This emphasis on ‘barriers’ has diverted attention away from what people actually do there when participating in arts events or institutions and how it effects their life both in the short and the long term. De Fillippis (2001) and Cameron and Coaffee (Cameron & Coaffee 2004) give an even more damning picture of the self-fulfilling prophecy of funding devoted to the improved impact of arts on social capital which does not create advances for the community, but for the few in charge of investment capital who control the regeneration of communities. The ability of most of these community-based organizations to generate long-term economic growth for their communities has emerged as being rather limited (Lenz 1988; Stoecker 1997), “simply creating community-based organizations in inner city neighborhoods does

not, by itself, generate economic prosperity or even economic security for the residents.” (DeFillippis 2001: 797). Guetzkow (2002), citing Zukin’s study of New York’s arts community as a key correlate of residential gentrification (Zukin 1989), argues that the artist is implicitly presented in arts development studies as a stalking horse for the needs of investment capital to revalorize neighborhoods. They point out that beyond the generalizing category of arts at play in funding reports, assumptions on the role of the individual artist prevail in cultural analyses, which take such creativity as exemplifying an important agent of gentrification processes. Far from reconnecting diverse populations to the mainstream, such funding leads in the second stage of capital development to the exclusion and actual displacement of the original carriers of creativity.

Jonathan Burnett (Burnett 2004) takes this cynical assessment of funding policies in the arts that are based on notions of diversity and social capital a step further. In his *Community, Cohesion and State*, he reviews the impact of the then Home Secretary David Blunkett’s advocating of ‘active citizenship’ programs as a ‘fundamental factor in the establishment of collective freedom’ (2004: 1). For in its coupling with social capital and community cohesion as a desired outcome of its development, the concept of diversity promotes, through stereotyping, the belief that there *is* a cultural ‘otherness’ intrinsic to communities and that this factor is potentially problematic – itself a means of marginalizing, isolating and segregating such communities as latent potential source of criminality and unrest (Burnett 2004: 5). The assumption of the factuality of diversity, as measurable social entity, makes policies set up in the spirit of sustainability into an instrument of social control and community cohesion, abandoning any attempt to recognize cultural diversity as a legitimate *social benefit* in its own right. The very concept of community cohesion at the heart of current diversity regulation thus “became incorporated within a political circle of exclusion, segregation, and control (Burnett 2004:9).

Critical academic revision of the impact of social capital thinking upon the perception of diversity has pointed out that it is based on a simple error, one which is fundamental to Putnam’s research which was based on an assumed link between associational life, high social trust and better government. The error was to adopt uncritically Putnam’s (2000) assessment of weak, for diverse, ties transmuting into



mobility opportunities through individual entrepreneurship which was based on his interpretation of earlier work by Granovetter's (1973), *The Strength of Weak Ties*. The problem in inner cities where diversity in the form of 'weak ties' is presumed to prevail is according to DeFillippis (2001:797), "not that there is a lack of trust-based social networks and support, but rather that these networks and support are unable to generate capital." Thus, social capital already exists in the positive reading of diversity and does not need to be developed at all; yet what needs to be understood is why it fails to achieve economic success, security and sustainability beneficial to the whole of the community.

How can one escape this doubleness inherent in the notion of diversity, seen as positive creative impulse ultimately only to be utilized by investment brokers who then get rid of diversity, and conversely seen as negative social factor to be suppressed and brought into the mainstream? Clearly, for cities to become centers of creativity and innovation turning them into the playground for the mainstream, corporate funding is unlikely to achieve a sustainable result. Research into the cultural dialogue through art has the responsibility of turning this tide by asking questions that investigate what diversity does to creativity and innovation, how it affects what people do with and through the arts in its many material manifestations.

In comparison to existing research trends, a number of the studies presented in this book have examined what happens when diversity regulation is taken consciously into consideration in the production of culture. Perhaps surprisingly, they unanimously report of tensions in the face of suggestions that culture should be shared, and of responses that include the shifting of center of creativity away from the influence of funding that is extended in support of diversity. Funding support for certain 'ethnic' cultural and artistic initiatives have led to tagging such activities and highlighted the ethnic dimensions of artistic production. Such institutionalization of the ethnic arts as a result of formalized funding has made an abrupt closure to the creative dimensions of this cultural production. Norris explained the deterioration of levels of attraction to the Asian cloth market following the implementation of funding which aimed to revitalize this part of London. Similarly, Kürti explained the efforts in the Hungarian media to highlight the discrimination cases against the Romany population. Such efforts have highlighted the ethnic profiling of this group and led to adverse results.

Elkadi, on the other hand, showed how an initiative based on economic and contemporary practice in architecture in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, rather than ethnic practices of this time in Northern Ireland, has led to rather successful outcome of a shared identity. Rather shockingly, a picture emerges of a ghettoisation of Arts in the Western World in the face of current diversity led funding policy, as creative resources and centers of excellence fail to thrive on the attention that economic and cultural policy is directing to them. Perhaps the most thought provoking paper in this volume is based on a study of cultural production in India, where living in the spirit of plurality is a reality of daily life, but where cultural production is owned and regulated from multiple, mutually exclusive and individuated standpoints. What, we are forced to ask, has happened to creativity in Europe under the auspices of a concept of plurality, which at face value appears to comply with the Indian ideal? However, the ethnicization of the production of arts is not the only concern in this book. The framework in which arts and architecture is produced is also critically explored in this book. The emphasis on property rights and legal frameworks have been steadily extended to arts and culture. This explains the emphasis on tangible rather than intangible heritage in the realm of cultural diversity.

Research into the arts and arts organizations has in general accepted the premise that *tangible* cultural heritage, that is, that all expressions of creativity brought under copyright law, reflect social categories of identity that exist in the form of neighborhoods or communities whose diversity can be mapped. Taking tangible cultural heritage as a given social fact, working definitions of diversity that are implicit in studies of the role of the arts in cultural dialogue are falling victim to a distinction operating in intellectual property law which devalues the plural dynamic implicit in *intangible* cultural heritage by restricting the flow of its expressions to state regulated networks and organizations. This point is taken up in Suzanna Chan's and Mia Laim Herms essay on Belfast art practitioners, from Beuys to Spaceshuttle, who chose NOT to favor tangible heritage, but moved the material manifestations around the city by in fact rendering them as intangible as possible, concentrating instead on relationships that emerge between individuals and sites of artistic intervention.

As new communication technologies and the rising economic significance of creative knowledge lead to a growing resistance to intellectual property law, new research into the role of the arts in cultural dialogue has had to adopt a dynamic approach that observes how diverse knowledge technologies and concepts of materiality and agency are owned and exchanged against a background imposed by diversity regulations (Halbert 2005). The papers in this collection thus take the discrete materialities of architecture, clothing, public art, and music as both generic as well as contextually defined variables whose interrelation with processes of diversity construction can be observed and compared.

Diversity construction clearly also involves social interaction and building social networks. Research and literature in this area is prolific, but has in the main been conducted in the spirit of a notion of ‘social capital’, which to date provides the rationale for support of the arts in deprived as well as marginalized communities. The projection of ‘social capital’ regeneration through arts participation enables councils to build up a portfolio of credible criteria for local communities, to construct a research framework that project possible outcomes, and thus to legitimate funding. Such submission to the relevance of social capital, and its widespread acceptance, has led to an explosion of reports in this area of cultural dialogue through arts.

### **Cultural Dialogue through Arts**

The social impact of the arts has been the subject matter of a number of studies and commissioned reports since the early 1980s. Social networking has been heralded as the solution for all kinds of problems ranging from the *personal* (improving student discipline and performance in schools) (Fiske 1999; Remer 1990), the improvement of individual well-being (Balkien 2000; Ball & Keating 2002; Turner & Senior 2000), to the *communal* which perhaps interests us most in this book, yet of which there are only less than a handful that can be considered to be useful. Notable is a remark by Guetzkow that most studies, with the exception of economic impact studies, focus ‘on the benefits that accrue to individuals and organizations involved in the arts, rather than the direct impact of the arts on a community as such’ (2002:5). One exception is Stern (Stern 1999; Stern 2001) who demonstrates that a greater concentration of arts organizations in a neighborhood leads to longer-lasting ethnic and economic diversity

in that neighborhood. Economic impact studies have further pointed out that the arts revitalize neighborhoods and promote economic prosperity (Costello 1998; SCDCAC 2001; Stanziola 1999; Walesh & Henton 2001). Others have argued that the arts provide a catalyst for the creation of social capital and the attainment of important community goals, leaving, however, the nature of community vague and the factor of diversity unspecified, while also failing to distinguish between nature of short and long term impact (Goss 2006; Matarasso 1997; Williams 1995).

Perhaps no other argument has been as widely used by reports on the role of the arts as that it is instrumental in creating the *social capital* necessary for community development. The idea of social capital appears to have received added currency in reports commissioned by arts councils and government organizations since Robert Putnam's influential definition that "social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" which may facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam 1993a; Putnam 1993b; Putnam 2000). It is unlikely that stressing the notion of 'the other' through ethnicisation of activities would lead to such an objective. As DeFillippis points out "social capital is an 'elastic term' with a variety of meanings" (DeFilippis 2001; Moore Lappe & Du Bois 1997), but its slipperiness, defining different sets of actions, outcome and relationships as social capital, may not be the only reason to reassess studies which have used this term with care. In fact, it is rather Putnam's arguments of what social capital does, which, DeFillippis argues, "are deeply flawed and have little or no theoretical support", focusing on individual achievement or the lack of it while ignoring earlier groundbreaking work on the intrinsic relation between social relationships and economic capital (2001: 782-783; (Loury 1977) and to a much clearer extent Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu 1985).

Two key components of earlier work on this topic by Pierre Bourdieu have been lost in Putnam's discussion of social capital. *First*, that the production and reproduction of capital is a process that is inherently about power. In this sense, property laws and legislation play a major role in these processes. Tangible rather than intangible cultural activities can therefore be much more valued in the networks of social capital. The intangible culture in Northern Ireland described by Elkadi was key to the success of the textile industry that united the two communities and provided a shared identity.

On the other hand, Norris's paper shows that when a particular ethnic group provided cultural goods to another solely on material medium, the results were less than favorable as the two communities remained in 'parallel' spheres. *Second*, since Bourdieu's interest is in the social production of classes, he distinguishes between the social networks that an individual is embedded in, and out of which social capital emerges, and the outcomes of those relationships. That is, social networks should *not* simply be equated to the products of those relationships, for doing so "would render invisible social networks that might be very dense, but nonetheless unable to generate resources, because of lack of access" (DeFillippis 2001:784). This was clearly displayed in Kürti's essay which shows that the intensity and 'density' of social networks among the Romany population was completely overlooked by the media in their ethnic representation. Such invisible social networks are not valued in the economic and social terms of 'social capital' model.

In the context of creativity and cultural production, De Fillippis (2001) offers an excellent analysis of the transformation in the definition of social capital at work in Putnam's model and its profound impact on the funding of community developments by national and international organizations. Social capital has become, for many international organizations such as the World Bank, something of a wonder drug" in the debate over poor neighborhoods and the ills of society (Chupp 1999). It seems that Putnam's model, with its emphasis on the material output, has transformed social capital from an intangible resource that is earned by individuals to commodities that are *possessed* (or not possessed – i.e. lacking) by either individuals or groups of people in regions, communities, cities, countries or continents. Putnam also conflates social capital with civil society of which the principal agents of social capital creation are voluntary organizations, driven by individuals, whose participation is consequently one of the chief targets of measurement in reports on arts development. Voluntary organizations such as Bowling Leagues, PTA's (Parent Teacher Associations), church groups and trade unions are shown to be theoretically, morally and politically comparable as articulations of 'civic virtue' which do not just promote and support democratic institutions of government, but can generate and sustain economic growth. Such organizations however rarely attract individuals/communities, who are defined as 'the other' and who have different objectives and live in a parallel dimension.

Putnam's advertising of the wonder drug of social capital led to an explosion of research and practices which invoked his views as axiomatic of a measurable approach to the design and evaluation of community based funding (Office for National Statistics 2001) despite profound criticism of the concept as gender blind, ethnocentric, and based on secondary datasets not primarily established for social capital (Davies 2001; Sixsmith et al. 2001). Putnam's recent and primary ethnographic study of *Bowling Alone* (2000) acknowledges what others have already pointed up as the *tyranny of social capital*, leading to the exclusion of outsiders, to a restriction of individual freedom and a downward leveling of norms as group solidarity is cemented by a common experience of adversity and opposition to mainstream society (Halpern 1999 ; Portes 1998). Yet perhaps most importantly for us, his methodology merely measures the changing social network patterns, rather than analyzing a decreasing pattern of membership in particular communities. This shortfall in Putnam's model has not been picked up on by research on the impact of the arts, which has so far merely measured 'success' and not the failure of projects (Guetzkow 2002). This criticism is developed in Simic's review of performance art experimentation, which traces the long-term impact of projects that would on all counts have been considered failures from a short-term perspective. She shows how the memory of performance arts projects is carried forward in artists' future projections of both their own and other's previous work as material to be work upon, to be improved and to be transformed to fit new contexts and desired impact. While the impact of any one performance may be negligible or even negative, the impact should be measured in the cumulative effect of successive experimentation, which registers itself first and foremost in the enhanced understanding, and which the artists themselves possess who come to recognize the nature and importance of their work over time.

Elkadi shows that manifestation of production of a shared identity can be visualized in public places. The essay explains that place cannot be objectivized in the way assumed by Putnam's model. Elkadi has built his criticism on Murtagh (skeptical views on the limitations of Social Capital approach within the complex and sensitized Northern Irish context where social trust precedes any other factors in constructing meaningful shared public places.

Measuring social trust, the core of Putnam's approach has since been criticized as unreliable; not just because statistical surveys are anything but objective accounts, but also as the model does not take into consideration the interpretations of concepts such as trust or even participation. that the methods of asking questions of individuals and aggregating their replies, as if collective social capital is the sum of individual social capital, is simply erroneous (Baron et al. 2000; Baron et al. 2006; Office for National Statistics 2001; Portes & Landolt 1996).

Jermyn and Desai (2000) explained that a recent report on the impact of arts funding recommendations in Britain, which broadly follow Putnam's definition of social capital, has given us a picture of policies that are based on one-sided and ethnocentric research whose failures are particularly apparent in relation to policies directed at ethnic minorities and the arts. Diversity indicators are shown to use concepts of identity and ethnicity irrespective of the complexity of those terms in contemporary Britain which has been well described in academic literature ((Blanco 1998) in Jermyn & Desai 2000).

## Conclusion

The research described in the essays that are assembled in this book reaches in significant ways beyond existing work carried out in the field of cultural dialogue and the management of diversity. Firstly, it directs attention to the so far neglected aftermath of the implementation of diversity regulation and of funding directed to communities to enhance diversity and to support integration. It seeks to document and describe what happens to expressions of creativity and to the consumption of the arts when ethnicity is marked as a major axiom of funding activities at the community level. While filling a gap in existing research, the work captured in this book also directs attention to long-term effects of diversity regulation upon the production of the arts. By tracing such an impact upon the production of arts as diverse as music, performance, fashion, architecture and media, the essays present us with novel data from which we can derive novel hypotheses about the conditions under which centers of creativity can thrive in a world where diversity is subject to regulation, and where

identity is captured in ethnic terms. Methodologically, the essays are paving the path for more integrated and networked research across Europe and beyond, with its tightly controlled comparison of the production of the arts across diverse communities in Europe and in India, where the guiding concept of plurality allows us to discern issues inherent in the sustainability of diversity that we are only just beginning to realize in Europe.



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