

# First Elements for a Method of Intercultural Dance Projects for Social Cohesion

*Synthetic conclusions from the workshop,  
by S. Kagan*

Thanks to the comprehensive exploratory work achieved in the workshop on May 27<sup>th</sup>, some first elements for a project methodology can be given. The following sketch benefited from the insights given by participants in both the discussion workshops and the dancing workshop. The methodology described here does not claim to be the only one. Far from it... it is on the contrary a stream of thought that calls forward further developments and criticisms.

A methodology to foster social cohesion through intercultural dance, with the intention to have a sustainable impact, should focus on a project: a creative participation project. The method to be promoted is thus a project method, and the first dimension of the method is the comprehensive use of Art for a successful intercultural interaction. We therefore start with the Dance method.

## *The Dance Method: a Group Formation Strategy for Togetherness*

Important points for **goal-definition**: The targeted achievements will be

- *for participants* first to be aware of diversity and to engage in the process of making connection...
- *for the group* then to “cross borders between layers and make a new group” (Janine), and to aim for the new, “the transcultural” (Guido)...
- *therefore* the goals will be to (1) bring down resistance, (2) provoke experiences and (3) shape a sense of belonging together.

Given these goals, the dance method will be the following:

- The dance work (in a group meeting, on a regular basis, for a workshop) should focus on developing skills: intercultural skills, learning by doing (especially relevant for dance). Intercultural awareness and knowledge need not be the focus, because they will have to be achieved in the process of learning skills, dancing skills. The following points will help move towards those intercultural skills:
- The dance work will have to go through a process materializing the difficulties in opening oneself to others: Why I don't listen to others... Why I don't feel *with* the other person here... The participant will have to recognize that blockage. Dance exercises using guidelines and improvisations will be followed, aiming to break down the blockage. This will need time and motivation and will mean some hard work will be done by the group of participants. Exercise with dance means that doing physically something together will force the participants to find the solution for themselves

personally and together as a group. The dancer has to follow the rules of the game, set in improvisation exercises:

- Observe the other while being yourself in movement (not an intellectual and voyeur observation) during the improvisation
  - Take what (s)he proposes, acquire it (in your movement) and then transform it...
  - Share you transformed movements with others, let it become a group language (transcultural, transformed by the bodies in movement but again: not intellectualized)
- To avoid blockages means to get rid of self-judgment from one's own mind (the ridiculous, the fear of doing wrong, the fear of exhibition and of the voyeur, etc.). As JF Duroure told the dancers: "Free your body!" A Chinese metaphor points at two enemies residing in oneself, in one's own mind... two blockages to overcome: "the judge and the victim".
- Once these processes have been engaged, when the blockages are weakening, the Dance Method goes one step further in opening up the participants and fostering their collective path towards the transcultural new language and belonging: The group works on 'discovering back' some archetypal types of behavior and of movement (archetypal = that are common to all human cultures and often date back to mythical past). For example, the group could work on the metaphor of the ritual fight: What are the different roles in a ritual fight? Can we recognize the patterns of the ritual fight? ... Then, this seminal work on archetypes should be used as a basis for develop and cross bridges between different cultures, styles and techniques of dance, to create one intercultural (or transcultural) choreography for the project.

A few more points are necessary about the dance method, additional remarks that are essential to the success of the process sketched above:

- Use a respected and skilled choreographer, who is able to reach the pupils and masters the different styles, and who ideally has an experience in (international and) intercultural dance projects.
- Have a mixed group of participants, with a balance between experienced dancers from different styles and techniques, and inexperienced amateurs from the neighborhood. So: mixed people (culturally and socially) and mixed styles.
- Use the opportunities to integrate a historical dimension (histories of cultural groups and personal histories), not only to learn about them but also to "overcome tradition" (Guido) and shape together new images, new metaphors and new stories.

### *Organizational Management: issues to consider*

The workshop allowed to discuss important issues for the peculiar organization of intercultural dance projects in urban neighborhoods. Three points are particularly worth our attention:

- In organizing such a project, three worlds have to be brought together: policy makers, social workers (and community-builders)

and artists. The workshop on May 27<sup>th</sup> was a step in this direction. It showed these groups hold three different perspectives. Their differences should not be ignored, they should be worked upon in order to bring their complementary skills under the roof of a project, asking them to focus on the project and bring contribution to both its participative and its artistic processes.

- The development phase for a project will consist first in a collective brainstorming in a working-group integrating the three worlds. The group will shape a project strategy with a development plan and a definition of target groups at one or 2 levels (participants and larger audience) with a reach-out plan for the target-group(s). An audience (in the traditional theatrical sense of a sitting public) is not per se necessary. The working-group has to be collectively open-minded, and think of opportunities for new ways to organize art in Public Space.
- Organizational Best Practice can be sought in existing World Music schemes and centers (for example in Rotterdam in the conservatorium and at the SKVR), to develop similar best practice in dance.

### *Diffusion: some elements for a reach-out method*

The promotion and diffusion of intercultural dance projects in urban neighborhoods is an essential part of a methodology for social cohesion. The issue here being that people must be reached to shape a committed group of participants, and also to go beyond that point:

- The family can be considered as a whole unit of interest. Indeed, the family has influence on the cultural practices, values and identifications of an individual. Meanwhile, with an appropriate organization, a whole family can be reached, starting from a single individual. This point is also valid for families of 'allochtons' living in Dutch cities.
- 2 levels can be reached, 2 target groups. The project organizers should strike a balance between the seduction of the feast (attraction, open promotion of the project, after the model of a folk dance party in all its simplicity and participative openness in Public Space) and the deep learning experience of group-work as defined in the Dance Method above (needing a longer time and some hard work, not just the fun of an ephemeral party). Therefore there should be both a core group of participants and dynamic festive encounters in the social environment (e.g. school activities, open air parties, parades, etc.).
- If the two levels are reached, this will have a further benefit: Because the professional choreographer and professional dancers meet the people at the people's level, then these people will dare to get interest in so-called High Art (in the discussions, Guido said we should "look at the boundary between low and high art [to] meet [otherwise] separate circles of exclusivity"). Such an achievement would then meet the objectives of the Actieplan CultuurBereik.

- The project organizers should make full use of existing networks, for example around Cultuurscouts as they exist in the Deelgemeenten of Rotterdam.
- A *hop-on technique* is recommended for the extension of the project from one neighborhood to the next (and therefore the sustainability of the process of social cohesion initiated in the first place): after successful completion of a project in one neighborhood, participants in the core-group of the project should move on to another neighborhood, engage festive encounters there (demonstrating in the process some of their aesthetic achievements) and foster the flow of new participants for an enriched core group operating in the new neighborhood.

### *Further reading*

There are unfortunately not a plethora of books available about general discussion of intercultural dance. However, the inquisitive reader will find elements for further reflections and insights in the following books:

- The result of a Dutch conference about education in World Dance (held in 1999): Laurien Saraber, *Tussen rasa en redouble, werelddans in de Nederlandse kunsteducatie*, LOKV Nederlands Instituut voor Kunsteducatie, 2000.
- Proceedings from the conference held in October 1999 during the Festival International de Nouvelle Danse in Montréal: Ed. Chantal Pontbriand, *Dance: distinct language and cross-cultural influences, Danse: langage propre et métissage culturel*, éditions Parachute, 2001.