

Comunicació i diversitat cultural
Comunicación y diversidad cultural
Communication and Cultural Diversity

Final considerations
Dialogue “Communication and cultural diversity”

Universal Forum of Cultures – Barcelona 2004

27th May 2004

As Co-Directors of the Dialogue, we would suggest the following final considerations, arising out of the intense activity – papers, contributions, discussion and debate – of the last four days. Our purpose in doing so is to build on the momentum created and provide a basis for ongoing debate. The outcomes described below will be the subject of further discussion on the Dialogue website, for the duration of Forum Barcelona 2004, until next September. The final conclusions will be disseminated by all available means and will also be presented to the Forum organisers for inclusion within the overall event Conclusions.

In the face of a dominant discourse that tends to regard discrepancy as a threat, our aim is to promote a debate transcending the limits of this Dialogue. We also seek to actively contribute to development of democratic communication and cultural policies that favour elimination of barriers and increased access to cultural diversity in the media.

1. THE UNIVERSAL FORUM OF CULTURES, BARCELONA 2004

Our first conclusions concern the experience gained from this Dialogue now coming to a close, as part of the Universal Forum of Cultures, Barcelona 2004. Once again, we have seen that it is only possible to contemplate the world from a concrete reality, a specific location, an identity – as a primary reference for cultural diversity from a civic and democratic perspective; yet we have also seen the need to commit ourselves to a world perspective, for mutual cooperation and understanding. Barcelona and Catalonia's experience of this first Forum in terms of the relation between the local and the global is of universal value in that it shows the need to place the concept of culture (in the broadest and most complex sense of the term) at the centre of the search for lasting democracy and peace in our society.

2. CULTURE AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

2.1. We have seen over the last four days that concepts are not neutral, rather they are dynamic. In this light, we feel that we must continue to revise and explore the interpretation of the democratic concept of cultural diversity, relating it to the political and economic reality of today's world, facing and focusing on the confrontation and conflict present in our society. Failure to address this conflict could mean that debate on cultural diversity merely serves to hide reality.

2.2. We must work to overcome the apocalyptic and bellicose view that sees cultural diversity in terms of a "clash of civilisations". To do this we need to reconsider our conception of what coexistence of different cultures means in terms of planetary balance. We need to recognise that different cultures and their beliefs, values, output, institutions and utopias, all constitute building blocks for the culture of peace.

2.3. Defence of cultural diversity also demands that we revise our concepts of centre and periphery, in global, state, national and local terms. We must also reconsider our concepts of politics and policy. Policies to promote cultural diversity are a matter of governance and have a major bearing for citizens and for public participation.

2.4. Linguistic diversity is a key element of cultural diversity, as reflected by numerous contributions to this Dialogue focusing on the experience of the Indian sub-continent, indigenous Latin American communities, and the languages of small European nations. In this context, we demand communication policies which take linguistic diversity into account, in a way that ensures it continues to be valued in the production of cultural goods and services.

2.5. Faced with the geopolitical complexity of our contemporary world, it is crucial that we face the twofold challenge of promotion of diversity: the global and the local. Firstly, the issue is a global one, entailing coexistence of forms of cultural expression, which must learn to face conflict and difference in a spirit of democratic openness. Secondly, at local level, we see that global imbalances, exclusion and authoritarianism tend to be replicated within the Nation State. Effective management of difference within states, regions, cities, including local communities, is the key to advancing towards a world where globalisation will not mean annulment of minority, minoritised or more vulnerable cultures expressions.

2.6. A democratic conception of cultural diversity means seeing culture not merely as a commercial product for business purposes, but as the supreme expression of society's material and non-material patrimony. Societies need this patrimony if they are to recreate their past, interpret the present and face a future of increasingly widespread interaction. We feel it is fundamental to foster and adopt the necessary political measures to not only preserve cultures, but also to transform them into difference, in a global context which is increasingly inclusive of diversity.

2.7. We are aware of the need to restore the credibility and legitimacy; the prestige of cultural policies as instruments to regulate the balance between different cultures. This will require consolidation of public debate, active promotion of public participation and criticism of inequality, also in the media. All in all, this represents a challenge for legislators, but also for the professionals and academics who must contribute to the reformulation of these policies due to the responsibility that is implied in the commitment to social needs.

3. THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

3.1. The first and foremost condition for cultural diversity in the media is freedom of expression. For this reason, this Dialogue on Communication and Cultural Diversity shares and will contribute to dissemination of the conclusions of the Dialogue "Information. Power and ethics in the 21st century", organised recently by the College of Journalists of Catalonia as part of this Forum.

3.2. Policies promoting pluralism in the media are essential as a means of ensuring cultural diversity. Yet, we must also revise and renew our conception of these policies, ensuring that they are not limited to supporting a quantitative presence of various political parties and defending their shares of influence, but rather involving civil society and a plurality of voices.

3.3. We also need in-depth reassessment of the mission of public media and their adaptation to the digital era. This revision must focus on a truly public service that favours political pluralism and cultural diversity.

3.4. The present changes taking place in the media and communication technologies represent an opportunity for transformation that must be taken. New use of communication are now becoming possible, all of which enable new ways of dealing with diversity, of representing the "other" and ensuring participation.

3.5. We must ask those in positions of responsibility in the media that they tackle the challenge of complexity in their production processes. This is essential to ensure a careful approach, avoiding trivialisation or 'dumbing down' of diversity. In addition, the media today are global instruments and as such they have a duty to work as instruments for interconnectivity within societies.

3.6. Recognition of cultural diversity demands that different communities and groups must have their own media, avoiding the general tendency for over-regulation and endangering the existence of smaller media and facilitating the growth of their larger counterparts. Communication policies must respond to these necessities.

3.7. In modern societies, harmonious coexistence also demands shared spaces, public spaces, not only in the media but also in our physical settings (squares, streets, festivals) aiming to overcome exclusion and facilitate communication between different cultures. A democratic society aiming to be just needs public space for representation and participation. The media, and today also information and communication technologies, are vital instruments for the creation of this public space.

3.8. Eliminating the barriers which hinder cultural diversity is also a challenge for education. We call on academics and media professionals to participate in joint projects with the education system, developing materials and initiatives for critical interpretation of media action, as well as initiatives that enable people to undertake a more critical reading of the media.

4. RESEARCH

4.1. Universities and research centres have a duty to foster critical research on cultural diversity and related issues. The availability of solid, rigorous and cross-checked information and diagnostic data (provision of which is all part of the university's mission) contributes to disarming prejudices, stereotypes and the negative associations of difference and diversity. It also helps to develop alternatives for a more plural world, inclusive and respectful of difference.

4.2. Academic institutions must work together to renew communication and media studies, promoting a inter-disciplinary, socio-cultural approach, capable of moving beyond the excessively descriptive current phase, which tends to neglect how media information is used.

4.3. It is vital to foster inter-disciplinary studies which, without neglecting communication perspectives, can also incorporate the economic dimension and more culture-oriented approaches.

4.4. We must also work to promote comparative studies at many levels: between countries, regions, communities, and research groups from different settings. This will lead to mutual benefits and identification of learning processes and mechanisms which could constitute models for harmonious coexistence in diversity.

4.5. We must favour and support the entry of research results into the sphere of public opinion so as to develop an ongoing dialogue between cultural industries, journalists and other communication professionals.

5. PROPOSALS

5.1. We invite all interested parties to participate in our on-line debate, which is now open on the InCom website (www.incomuab2004.org). Express your views on the various papers and debates, these final considerations.

5.2. It is proposed to create an Internet-based education platform bringing together the papers, contributions and discussions of this Dialogue and adapting them as educational

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materials for groups with an interest in communication and cultural diversity, professionals, educators and researchers.

5.3. It is proposed to create and diffuse a source of the most relevant media and information communication technology experiences on cultural diversity through the online education platform. The aim of this initiative is to foster communication of these experiences and help to develop an international network for exchange and collaboration.

5.4. Bearing in mind the critical views presented here regarding media treatment of 'the other', we call on academic institutions, professional media organisations and regulating bodies to act against all forms of cultural discrimination, exclusion and distortion, or simplification of 'the other'.

5.5. We also call on all participants in this Dialogue to take an active role in ongoing debate at local or global scale which may serve to promote cultural diversity.

5.6. Taking into consideration that UNESCO, sponsor of this Forum, is immersed in the process of organising a Convention on Cultural Diversity, and that we are in the middle of the World Summit on the Information Society, the reflections and proposals made as part of this Dialogue can contribute to these important initiatives.

5.7. Finally, we call upon those responsible for the legacy of the Universal Forum of Cultures Barcelona 2004 to incorporate in their conclusions the necessity to consider communication as a key theme in cultural policies for the new century. In addition we call for the transmission of these issues to the organisers of future Universal Forums of Cultures taking into consideration, from a critical perspective, that nowadays the media act as a global instrument and that they must take responsibility to work actively to break down the barriers and make cultural diversity possible in an increasingly interconnected world.

This was also the objective of our Dialogue. If we have made a step in this direction we will be able to say that, with all modesty, we have achieved our objective in contributing to the Universal Forum of Cultures, Barcelona 2004.

By way of final comment, in the name of the Institut de Comunicació (Incom) from the UAB, we express our gratitude to the Forum, to all of you and to our colleagues for the opportunity to organise this Dialogue on Communication and Cultural Diversity.

Thank you.

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