

# ROME & BIRMINGHAM – A DIALOGUE

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## OBJECTIVES

We looked at the efforts of broadcasters to reach out to diverse audiences. Our project visited community organisations representing a variety of ethnic minorities some of whom have been settled in the country for several decades. We talked not only to these communities but also to the main broadcasters as well as community broadcasters.

In Birmingham we looked at the BBC's attempts to reach out and represent minority ethnic people, all of whom pay the licence fee. We looked at how and why the Asian Network was set up to serve the Asian communities back in the 1980's this is now a thriving national digital service. It has helped Asian broadcasters move into the mainstream. We also looked at Maverick TV one of the independent successful companies making content for the public and private broadcasters, into how they reach out to diverse communities.

Our understanding of diversity - this was one of the challenges, many people have different interpretations. This was our conclusion.

- By diversity we mean an acute consciousness and greater awareness of difference determined by factors such as culture, ethnicity, colour, national and regional affiliation, gender, sexuality, religion, language, age and disability
- These differences are major determinants of our lives and provide the foundations on which our identities are constructed
- Diversity adds a valuable aesthetic dimension to our lives, broadens the range of our moral sympathy and imagination and encourages us to engage in a process of critical self-analysis
- Diversity is fundamental to the working of a mature, open and democratic institution

## MIGRATION PATTERNS

Britain's immigration goes back decades and much of it came about as a result of its industrial past. The industrial Revolution of the past brought Birmingham into close economic contact with foreign markets. The factories and foundries of the past have almost disappeared and replaced with other forms of manufacturing, commerce or trade.

Birmingham like other cities in the UK has been the home of generations of people whose origins are in other countries. Some Black and Asian came before 1914 but the main migration was post war and from the British colonies where people already has British Citizenship. In the sixties many immigrants came to fill jobs, which no one else wanted to do, in factories, in transport and as nurses. Now the country is into its fourth of fifth post war generations of people whose roots are in other countries.

In comparison the migration to Italy and Rome is more recent, a factor which needs to be considered when looking at how broadcasters deal with new communities.

## DEVELOPING THE STRATEGY

- Any diversity strategy must be integrated into all aspects of the organisation's activities
- This means that a comprehensive strategy should cover governance arrangements, displays and exhibitions, employment practices and service delivery
- It needs to identify internal and external barriers to participation in all its activities by under-represented groups

## EMPLOYMENT

- A strategy of inclusion does not compromise the principle of selection on merit but ensures that all competitions for jobs are fair, open and sensitive
- Attention should be paid to employment patterns at every level and in every department broadcaster
- The broadcaster may wish to consider adopting a legitimate policy of positive action while being clear that positive discrimination is illegal under race relations legislation
- The broadcaster must be alert to targets becoming quotas

## SERVICE DELIVERY

- It needs to harness the full power of information technology and new media to reach out to younger and inaccessible audiences

## OTHER FACTORS

- **Universality** - Universality is one of the core principles of public service broadcasting and is more important than ever in the digital age. We must avoid the creation of a digital underclass.
- **Limiting our ambition** - The BBC cannot afford to compete in every market. The licence fee settlement gives the BBC freedom and independence BUT in return it has to represent all sections of the communities.
- **Commitment** to reflecting the whole of the UK or the whole of Italy should be made by all broadcasters and not just the Public Service broadcaster. The responsibility for reflecting the whole of the UK for example has shifted from ITV to the BBC and will be a central plank of the BBC's purpose in the years ahead. Commercial pressures are taking their toll on ITV's regional news. One of the area we discussed was how helpful Multiculturalism is in this case.

Multiculturalism of the past decades is now in question in the UK but maybe not so in Rome where it is still a concept to be considered. Cultural diversity of the past developed its own exclusive dynamic, cut off from wider historical, political and economic processes. In this isolated territory, it became an equalities agenda. The charge now levelled at multiculturalism is that it created a false sense of harmony by establishing a system for the distribution of power and resources which worked for a while but which was unable to adapt to change, and which imperceptibly moved from being part of the solution to part of the problem. Particularly at the local level it is argued that the system encouraged the creation of culturally and spatially-distinct communities, fronted by

'community leaders' and where difference became the very currency by which importance was judged and progress made.

Another accusation is that far from being a system which spoke to the whole of British society, multiculturalism spoke only for the minorities. This served to maintain the exoticism and essentialism of minority cultures hindering a two-way conversation with British culture. It is also accused of having devalued and alienated the culture of the white working class, driving them further away from the goal of tolerance and into the arms of extremists.

In the case of Italy, perhaps multiculturalism should be skipped and INTERCULTURAL put in its place.

We explored the concept of Interculturality.

So finally, to the new concept of interculturality. The basis of this approach is it creates the opportunity for two different entities to know a little more about how to reassure and interest the other whilst also avoiding those things which might insult or alarm them, thus minimising the potential obstacles to the transaction. It is not only a tool for communication but for mutual learning and joint growth. This implies a different way of reading situations, signs, symbols, moods, and of communicating, which can be described as cultural literacy. This in turn requires the acquisition of an intercultural competence which in a diverse society is going to become as important a competency as basic numeracy and literacy. Broadcasters have a role to explore this space and to look at how their interaction with communities supports this.

Interculturality is being offered as the new model of diversity policy to replace the once adequate but now outmoded model of multiculturalism. It is not. There is much within multiculturalism, particularly as it is being reformed through Community Cohesion and other critiques, which still speaks to our neighbourhoods. It would be wrong to throw out the baby with the bathwater, or to give any succour to the implacable enemies of cultural diversity.

But the intercultural approach goes beyond equal opportunities and respect for existing cultural differences to the pluralist transformation of public space, institutions and civic culture. It does not recognise cultural boundaries as fixed but in a state of flux and remaking. An intercultural approach aims to facilitate dialogue, exchange and reciprocal understanding between people of different backgrounds.

We believe this is a dialogue which both Rome and Birmingham need to engage in.