

**Reaction from the Higher Arts Education Sector on the
Call for Ideas Intercultural Dialogue Year 2008**



Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to a call for ideas on the Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008 in a relatively early phase of the preparations. The following comments are submitted on behalf of the *European League of Institutes of the Arts (ELIA)*, which is the main subject association in Higher Arts Education in Europe. ELIA represents 350 higher arts institutions across Europe, providing higher education in architecture, art, dance, design, media arts, music and theatre. We develop the creative potential of future artists and offer the possibility of learning in and through the arts. More and more the schools produce arts professionals, able to work collaboratively with an understanding of the social and organisational context in which they are operating, and are capable of constantly updating their skills and knowledge in response to changing requirements.

Our comments focus on how the higher arts institutions could directly and indirectly contribute to the intercultural dialogue.

A) How can one contribute towards identifying, evaluating, developing and exchanging projects, experience and good practice in intercultural dialogue on a European scale?

The Higher Arts Education Institutions in Europe are rooted in their societies and are more and more involved in local community initiatives in a number of ways. Programmes are undertaken in partnership with neighbourhood organisations, primary and secondary schools, and organisations from ethnic minorities. Some of these could be identified, evaluated and exchanged in the form of case studies and serve as good practice in an intercultural dialogue on a European scale.

1. In order to prevent the loss of young talents, arts schools are developing alternative pathways into arts education for young talented people from different ethnic backgrounds in the form of foundation programmes, leading to a qualification and programmes as part of lifelong learning.
2. Arts schools are involved in neighbourhood programmes focusing on children and young people from different ethnic backgrounds, for instance in dancing, theatre, drawing etc. Rep, street dancing, digital drawing are some examples.
3. Art students and young artists are working in primary schools to teach art in unconventional ways and to nurture children's creativity, increasing new jobs for young artists, creating new models for arts education and improving partnerships between art schools and other actors.
4. Teaching and learning of traditional art forms in theatre, dance, painting, sculpture, weaving, fashion, goldsmithing, ceramics has always been part of arts educational programmes, and increasingly traditional and new art forms are sparking off each other into new approaches.
5. Pilot programmes are being developed training creative people from different ethnic backgrounds who can play an intermediary role in their own community.
6. Some art schools in Europe are involved in working with traumatised children in and through the arts in (post-) conflict zones.

B) What information and communication initiatives could contribute towards involving all European Union residents, and particularly young people, in the promotion of intercultural dialogue in day-to-day life (e.g. schools and other places of education, sporting and cultural activities, the workplace, etc.) and familiarising them with it?

We very much agree that information and communication initiatives should focus on young people and intercultural dialogue in day-to-day life in an unconventional way. Rather than a slick information campaign, we are strongly in favour of a set of different communication initiatives designed and produced by young people themselves, for instance in the field of film, theatre, dance, music, design, cartoons and our membership institutions will be happy to contribute to further develop these ideas. The following concrete examples could be part of such a set of information initiatives.

- An online game could be developed addressing either children or young people addressing day-to-day situations. This game could be designed and produced by the Utrecht School of the Arts, which is a reputed institute in the field of animation and has developed the first European Masters course, training online game designers. A first generation of online game designers has just graduated. The first ideas go into the direction of an 'alternate reality game', which would be able to establish digital exchange between thousands of schools or individuals.
- With support of the ECF a documentary on intercultural dialogue is currently being produced by the Universität der Künste Berlin. This could be extended with a series of short films (1-2 minutes) produced by different European film schools. The National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts Sofia and the Latvian Music, Theatre and Film Academy are particularly active in this field and could coordinate such an initiative. It would be important to stress different national and intercultural angles on intercultural dialogue.

C) What specific European-scale initiatives likely to reach, directly or indirectly, as many people in the European Union as possible – and particularly young people – could contribute towards promoting intercultural dialogue?

We would like to make some brief additional remarks about the organisation and the year, the priorities and the process of collaboration with the European Commission.

1. **Partnership.** First of all the European League of Institutes of the Arts is willing to be actively involved as one of the partners in the Year of Intercultural Dialogue. ELIA member institutions in different member states are willing to be involved in the implementation of the year.
2. **A creative dialogue, not a religious dialogue.** In our discussions with schools in different countries it has become clear that the term intercultural dialogue does not have the same meaning everywhere and that people and institutions are affected by it in different ways. It should be clear what the European Commission sees as the intercultural dialogue. In this respect we strongly oppose the suggestion of the European Parliament that the year should mainly focus on religion. In our view the key should be cultural diversity in day-to-day situations and we would like to introduce the term **creative dialogue**, with a focus on conflicts between traditional and contemporary reality, open debates, to help develop multiple identities, and to define new roles of culture (including religion) in democratic societies. A main focus on religion would only increase the risk that the year is dominated by discussions between Islam and Christianity and that fixed positions take over from open debate and dialogue.
3. **European intercultural dialogue prize.** In addition to what has been proposed already we would like to remark that we are strongly in favour of the suggestion of the European Parliament of a European intercultural dialogue prize. In our view the prize should focus on particularly successful neighbourhood projects, organising concrete cultural activities in their neighbourhood, creating active and communicative interaction between children, parents, surrounding communities and arts institutions.
4. **Platform.** We strongly support the Intercultural Dialogue platform, initiated by EFAH and ECF and see the platform as an essential initiative in order to structure the intercultural dialogue as a long-term objective. The platform can build bridges between EU policy and initiatives going on in the field, as well as between the involved organisations. Therefore it would deserve financial support from the European Commission for its functioning.