REPORT

(by Fernanda Capibaribe)

"What is Missing? Learning from difficulties and failures: a dialogue between grant makers and beneficiaries"

Rio de Janeiro, Monday, 27th November, 2006

Chairperson: **Ugo Bacchella – Fondazione Fitzcarraldo**

Paul van Paaschen – Hivos Foundation

Kathinka Dittrich van Weringh – European Cultural Foundation

Carla Delfos – European League of Institutes of the Arts

Natacha Melo – Grupo de Gestion RSD

The meeting started with a presentation of the participants, followed by an audio interview with **Paul van Paaschen**, that could not attend personally the meeting. The interviewer, Ugo Bacchella, asked *what prevents many foundations from engaging in the international cultural cooperation*. Paul van Paaschen raised some issues that are listed below:

1. **The lack of defined policies related to culture and the problem of intangible results**

   Much of the cooperation is centered around projects and assistance. Arts and culture, or cultural expression is often seen as not relevant.. Cultural cooperation is probably too intangible for many of the donors, also because the relevance and the results of this kind of activities are not tangible and evident.

Various foundations/governmental agencies fund however international cultural cooperation and networking because these activities can

- bridge different cultural regions, exchanging different visions, ideas and feelings, what is very important in an economically globalizing world;
- facilitate professional cooperation and exchange programs;
- reach an international audience by organizing public arts events and initiatives and by making information accessible (publications and internet).

2. **The critical points from the donors perspective when dealing with cultural networks**

- **Difficulty in learning what is going on:** networks do the same things and do not know each other;

- **Too often networks cover many issues** in their tasks and this makes it difficult to focus and to know their activities.

- **Nature and structure**: how can the ownership be organized? What do participants expect? Is there financial contribution by the membership or not? The ownership by and commitment of the participants can be different from network to network depending on the nature of the membership, e.g. if it is based on financial contribution, or not. This determines the degree to which people have a firm stake in the network.

- **Continuity**: grant makers want to invest in stable medium term projects (lasting minimum two years). In order to achieve this aim, the network must have a long term perspective.

- **Outputs and effects of the work of cultural networks**: it is often difficult to substantiate and make them visible. It is better for the grant makers to finance concrete projects, such as an art exhibition, than something as intangible as a network.

- **Administrative/financial transparency and democratic set-up**: can be a critical point if members do not feel represented by the decision making structure.

- **Financial issues**: funding basis is often unstable and the audited accounts required by many of the donors are often difficult to produce;

- **Different networks with different ideas**: attention must be paid in the definition of procedures. Procedures should be shared and be clear to everyone;

- **Relation between networks and foundations**: More research and knowledge on the networks activities is needed. Organizing frequent meetings to discuss themes related to possible partnership can be a good path to follow.

Kathinka Dittrich van Weringh focused on *the main obstacles to cross-border, cross-sector cooperation and to everything that crosses*. She speaks as a former cultural journalist; as long experienced cultural operator, as researcher; as politician and now as president of the European Cultural Foundation based in Amsterdam. She listed two points :

1. **What are the main obstacles and previous results**
- The first main obstacle is the mental one. **All the actors involved speak different mental languages, which is more than a linguistic problem**. Unwritten laws are essential.. How to deal with this when financing a project of international cultural cooperation? It is very important to enter in the other's mind, to comprehend how they think and how they talk;
- Another obstacle is related to the wrong idea about the foundations' mission. **It seems that the foundations are morally obliged to help the networks and this idea makes the dialogue more difficult than it should be**;
- **Who are the networks?** Are they stable? Can foundations count on them? How can foundations evaluate their actions? How can foundations have the warranty that the funded networks will develop their projects? These are some of the questions that foundations ask when they analyze a project. There is sometimes no answer and **it is necessary to take the risk**: foundations must be able to understand the context, but many of them are much more concerned about quantity, and not about the quality of the applicants' projects ;
- **Most of the European foundations, mainly the western European ones, focusing on arts and culture, work 95% in local, regional and national contexts**. In the last 20 years they have developed their own projects and the money for grant making has proved to be **little flexible**. Furthermore many

foundations in Latin America and other areas are **not transparent**: there is too much corruption and this makes the negotiation very difficult.

Carla Delfos spoke about *what actors of international cooperation expect from foundations*, reporting back the point of view of the cultural networks participating in the previous meeting on networking, that she described as *difficult, useful, informative and rich*.

How can both foundations and networks establish a structure that enables them to work together and exchange information? Networks welcomed the foundations' remark on the difficulty of getting necessary information about their activities and agreed to form a group whose task is to collect as much information as possible and to provide foundations with it.

Despite the diversity of the networks involved in the meeting, they actually have a lot in common since they all develop *cross-border activities and projects* between countries, cities and disciplines. This work is based on confidence, on a shared passion, and on many common features such as:

-   The **trust among members**;
-   **Flexibility**, providing and sharing **information**;
-   The creation of **dialogue and awareness**;
-   The creation of **opportunities**;
-   **Transparency**;
-   The conviviality in an environment of **diversity**;
-   The identification of **practices and development centers**.

Foundations are often more accessible and open than governments. So, **what is now missing is a dialogue that takes into account each others' needs.** The networks knowledge and experience are useful for foundations, and viceversa. **This meeting can hopefully be the starting point for sharing and cooperating on an equal basis**.

Natacha Melo mentioned her experience as a member of the Grupo de Gestion RSD, that worked for two years with the Prince Claus Fund and has been now working for

two years with the Hivos foundation. The relation between her network and these foundations – she said –are like a *love relationship*: **one has to listen to the other, in order to give value to and respect each other's work**. Space must be also left to mistakes, doubts and the unforeseen. The most important thing is to establish a frank dialogue on an equal basis, without any hierarchy. The focus must be on cooperation: when one part does not cooperate with the other one, both can loose opportunities.

Concerning politics, conceptions and ethics, it is necessary to share and exchange about:
- **Cooperation policies** to be developed;
- **Management models that give better results** and that can be compatible also with the new artistic expressions;
- **Methodologies to be used** to foster dialogue and mutual comprehension;
- **Criteria for evaluating projects**.

An intelligent group should be created, where the participants acknowledges the potentials of the others.

Commenting a Van Paaschen's critical point "*networks cover too many themes and issues*", NM pointed out that it is very difficult for a network to focus specifically on one point and the variety of themes and issues provides various points of view and perspectives. Networks deal with diverse contexts.

The panelists' speeches were followed by a debate on

The Foundations' priorities and project applications

Comment: It will be useful for the networks to better know which kinds of cultural projects the foundations are interested in. What do the foundations want? Do people from the foundations have experience on cultural management?

Answer: It is very important to make strategic reflections about foundations. Foundations have got responsibilities, since they can provide financial resources. Identifying strategies is therefore essential.

Comment: It is important to think that a bad application does not necessarily implies that the project is not good. Foundations should provide networks with more information and guidelines to draft a good application.

Answer: More attention should also be paid to the internet: Most of the foundations funding programmes are accessible on the web. It is a networks' responsibility to get information on the foundations' priorities; such information is not difficult to find.

Comment: The human relations are very important. However, what counts most is the quality of the project and the professionalism. A general advice for artists could be to avoid easy influences, to be aware and curious about what is being done around.

Comment: The networks expect quick and helpful answers. They expect from the foundations to know if a project is applicable, or if it is out of the foundations focus.

Evaluating networks

The World Bank has created an evaluation tool that measures the development coefficient of the projects, what could be useful for those who want to know if their projects are applicable.

Other kinds of evaluation can be however developed and shared among foundations and networks, even though qualitative evaluation is always difficult. The first step should be to keep in touch, and to start to use the available tools.

It is not appropriate to evaluate a network in the same way that projects are evaluated; specialist researchers in evaluation now agree on this. Projects have fixed aims, objectives and time-frames. Networks are dynamic structures which evolve over time in all aspects because they are based on relationships and situations which themselves are constantly evolving. Thus the aims of actions, as well as the actions and the participants, will be mutating over any given period of time. Many existing models of project evaluation are being used on networks and risk to deliver erroneous data. Thus there is a growing need to study and propose new evaluation methodologies for networks.

Yet foundations need to be open to learning as much as possible from the networks and projects they fund. This is often difficult. IETM was commissioned by the European Cultural Foundation to look into new tendencies in cultural management in South East Europe. For this research, foundations were asked what they had learned from the beneficiaries' experiences. Many could not even understand the question. Others admitted the impossibility of learning anything beyond what was in the standard final report which all beneficiaries had to return.

Grants flexibility and correct applications

The specific nature of foundations implies that they have a statute, a mission established by its founders and they cannot run away from their original mission; particularly in some countries, the juridical framework defines the scope the foundations activities.

It was suggested that foundations should be open to the unforeseen and therefore be capable of changing their mission to embrace new ideas. This could also be a way of testing the foundations mission. And if the project does not match the foundation's mission, another solution should be found.

Comment: Different possible interpretations are possible in a changing scenario, even for the foundations. The difficulty in finding an agreement among foundations and networks is part of a process that should be followed to reach such agreement.

The innovation management has a lot in common with the cultural systems: they both are socio-technical systems based on the cooperation of the working teams that assures the dissemination of the acquired knowledge. Everybody should learn more about **innovation systems**, that involve basically four social actors: government, universities, business companies and the civil society. A **training program for the networks** helping them in submitting correct applications, and also to evaluate social impacts of such projects.

Comment: In Argentina, associations and foundations have a common specific application that can fit on a lot of purposes and kinds of projects. The limitations are very little, unless they don't fit in the law terms.

Comment: Even though the mission of a foundation is set, it is however possible to accept many different projects. A foundation's mission can not be static and should find ways to be flexible and to meet proposals that are different from the usual ones.

Answer: In Italy, the expenditure of the 88 foundations of banking origin in 18 different fields are earmarked at the local and regional level, and the international cooperation is almost impracticable. It is difficult to support international projects and even more to international networks.

Comment: Why do we rarely see foundations representatives participating in the festivals they fund?

Answer: Because foundations usually have few people working on a lot of projects and with many tasks.

Answer: This problem must be solved in order to establish a fruitful dialogue. Direct and personal contact is necessary to find a mutual agreement. The most important thing at all is the possibility of knowing one another. That's why we should take the opportunity offered by this meeting.

Giving continuation to this meeting would be important, as well as agreeing on the next steps, on what foundations and networks can further do. Fist of all they should arrange a next meeting; to "unfold" all the issues that were raised today.

Another possibility is a **training program for the foundations** that are approaching the cultural networks theme.

This meeting has proved to be a challenge both to foundations' and to networks' practices and skills. The next meeting should start a mutual learning process, with a well prepared debate and should include also some sort of training, in order to create the conditions for supporting a structured framework for international cooperation. This is just the beginning, even though no one can warrant on the continuity of this process.

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