

How to deal with an increasing western-focused world?

Some reflections for cultural professionals about mondialité in cultural events.

The present world, dominated by high-speed information, easy access to knowledge and powerful cross-fertilisation of cultures, could on one hand ideally favour social and cultural integration by putting in contact different cultures, but on the other hand the shared feeling is that we are experiencing an increasing cultural globalisation, a sort of cultural holiopoly (held by the so-called western world) imposing its rules upon other cultures.

Nowadays it seems more and more that society needs to choose either to be “globalised” and surrender to a progressive homologation of costumes, or “localised” and therefore opting for isolation in order to preserve its identity. In this nightmare scenario the words of Edouard Glissant, a Martiniquais essayist and writer offer a third possible solution. In his book, called “*Traité du tout-monde*” he adopts another model with respect to mondialisation that flattens the peculiarity of each culture.

He crafts the word *mondialité* explained through the archipelagus model, where contact is inevitably necessary between cultures, that can reciprocally enrich, preserving their identities without the prevarication of any of them on the others. I believe in an increasing need of a *mondialité* vision and in cultural action as a mean to foster this education, especially for the young generation. Cultural initiatives can revitalise a city, promote group identity, build social cohesion; they can expand cultural boundaries and, through the contact with diversity and above all appreciation of diversity, foster interculturality and dialogue between inhabitants of a city, of a country, of the entire world.

Questing for a virtuous example of cultural *mondialité* I found myself in Portugal, in search of an example to develop the audience to diversity in the music field at FMM Festival Músicas do Mundo, a folkloric music festival held every year in the small town of Sines. Portugal can be considered the bridge that connects Europe to the Latin and African world for its population, being a melting pot of cultures, and Sines, being Vasco da Gama’s birthplace, the historical connection to the intercultural revolution that was brought about by the navigator’s travels. Sines, having been an important port and industrial centre, became strongly multiethnic during the years but in the centuries it progressively became peripheral, losing its ancient importance.

FMM, created by the Municipality to revitalize the town centre, in 17 years of existence through its cultural offer made Sines become again a reference point to discover new worlds with an increasing public of 100.000 spectators. FMM, with the current offer of 40 concerts from 30 different Countries can be considered an expression of the ‘genius loci’ besides ‘genius mundi’ where eastern music meets Asia, Africa, America, Oceania in a reciprocal enrichment, representing the ideal “archipelagus model”.

The importance of this event relies in its will to eradicate the concept of folkloric music being something necessarily static or “isolated” but something connected both to roots and dynamism, evolving while travelling around the world with influences and migrations but at the same time preserving its fundamental identity. This means that folkloric music is about origins, metamorphosis and contamination as Alessandro Portelli underlined in the opening conference of the festival. The audience is invited to explore cultures through music meeting artists with mixed Cultural backgrounds as well as very traditional performers, absorbing the concept that tradition and experimentation can meet.

The festival is characterized by the crossing of genres as fado, rap, flamenco, bossanova, Jazz, gnawa, experimental rock, classical indian music, samba, cumbia, electronica, percussion music, reggae, funky, soul, blues, and countries, as Mali, Brazil, Guinée-Bissau, Angola, China, Korea, France, Spain, Congo, U.S.A, Madagascar, India.

At FMM the spectator realizes the existence of a parallel world to the eastern mainstream music.

Nevertheless appreciation of diversity is a complex process and needs time. The role of Cultural professionals is to find the right approach to couple the activities of audience development with audience loyalty and exert a pedagogic function in order to change the mode of perception, filtered by social codes. As underlined by Pierre Bourdieu, readability of an artistic expression varies between the code that it objectively requires and the competence of the individual, i.e. the degree to which the social code is mastered.

The objective of Cultural events is therefore shortening the divergence between the level of emission and the level of reception by the public, not lowering the level of emission (i.e. proposing only mainstream events) but rather to work on intensification of the reception level, as Bourdieu (1984) suggests. FMM used public spaces offering a number of concerts for free in order to stimulate participation of residents that have never attended at a festival; it also promoted educational activities for children, workshops for adults and camping area for free while maintaining affordable tickets to access to the castle concerts.

In these years, due to a passionate team headed by the artistic director Carlos Seixas since the first edition, Sines Municipality seems to have achieved its strategic goal and year by year it proposes high level music to a non-specialised audience that in the years becomes quite specialised and increasingly able to distinguish traditions, costumes and music features of each Country. To conclude, a folkloric music festival can foster social inclusions relying on emotions.

In this year's edition Mamar Kassey's music from Niger made the audience dance until not feeling legs anymore, transmitting Nigerian energy; Mulatu Astatke's music hypnotised spectators making them dream of the Ethiopian landscapes, while the Polish group Cicha & Palyga played music composed in nine different languages, letting the audience discover the minorities inhabiting the Podlaquian region. During Lebanese artist Ibrahim Maalouf's performance the audience kept their eyes shut and could imagine, maybe for the first time, civil war in Lebanon and Beirut after its end.

After this event we can be sure that the participants will feel the need to discover more about Iran and Burkina Faso, China and Korea, Benin, India, Lebanon, Israel, Turkey, Madagascar, Colombia. FMM is about experiencing music, but looking at it more in depth it is actually something more. Quality Cultural events have the power to take the audience out of the comfort zone in a gentle way, holding its hands in a journey, planting the feeling that diversity is a powerful enrichment and that contamination doesn't mean losing identity, and its preservation doesn't need barriers. It is in favour of local cultures but against a mono-culture, in favour of creativity and public support to foster enrichment and inclusion.

Reference

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