

What is cultural diversity? What is audience development?

Hardish Virk looks at understanding diversity before developing the audience

'Culture is a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group. It encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, values systems, traditions and beliefs. Respecting and safeguarding culture is a matter of Human Rights.'

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)

'Cultural diversity encompasses the cultural differences that exist between people, such as language, dress and traditions, and the way societies organise themselves, their conception of morality and religion, and the way they interact with the environment.'

www.wikipedia.org

So, if we start from the premise that we as human beings are all culturally diverse, then it is easier to relate to the notion of cultural diversity as we all have different values, lifestyles, beliefs and traditions. More interestingly, what do we have in common? Our religions might be different but our values and some of our traditions might be similar; our history of the arts might be different but we might experience the arts in similar kinds of spaces; we might live in different geographical areas but our lifestyles might be the same.

It is this understanding of ourselves or our cultural diversity that makes it easier for us to relate to other people's cultural diversity. This makes it easier to identify our similarities as well as our differences. This mindset is crucial when developing a strategy for audience development work.

'We see audience development as a planned and targeted management process which involves programming, education and marketing (underpinned by research and evaluation) working together to deliver an organisation's overall objectives. Although crucial to delivering financial objectives, effective marketing and audience development also ensure that arts organisations continue to be relevant to all the different communities of interest they serve.'

Scottish Arts Council



'Audience development involves breaking down the physical, psychological and social barriers which stop people participating in or attending the arts.'

Heather Maitland, *A Guide to Audience Development*

So, what is audience development? It is essentially the process of developing audiences. What do we mean by developing? Developing could mean the sustaining of existing audiences for existing spaces, existing and new work and new audiences for new spaces and new work. What do we mean by audiences? An audience is anyone who is engaging with an arts experience on an attendance or participatory basis. Audience development is a strategic process that in my experience considers research (desk research, outreach), developing tailored marketing tools and methodologies and working towards sustaining audiences.

Being aware of and relating to cultural diversity on a social and human level sets a solid foundation from which audience and visitor development work can successfully grow. In recent years, cultural diversity has referred to different and specific sections of our communities including Black and Minority Ethnic and this has definitely been the case in the arts. This article is not written to debate or explain the thinking and strategy behind the historical uses of the term 'cultural diversity' but it is important to be aware that, as individuals, organisations and sectors, we can have different relationships with it.

No matter if it's cultural diversity or just diversity, as it's now becoming the case within the arts sector – these are only words if there is no real action attached to them. Diversity action plans have and are now being requested by Arts Council England of regularly funded organisations (RFOs). Therefore, it could be argued that 'cultural diversity' and 'diversity' are now becoming practical and accessible terms.

'Race, ethnicity and faith will remain major preoccupations in this country and the arts are fundamental to such debates. The arts help us to develop a sense of our identity and ourselves as individuals, as members of our communities and as a nation. The debate now also needs to encompass a richer and more broad-ranging definition of diversity. By "diversity", we mean that we will respond to issues around race, ethnicity, faith, disability, sexuality, class and economic disadvantage – any social or institutional barriers that prevent people from participating in and enjoying the arts.'

Arts Council England

The journey of cultural diversity from theory to research to policy to action will continue alongside the growing diversity of our communities and their cultures. ■



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