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Multiculturalism - helping everyone to make sense of the World!

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Surveying the different issues that relate to 'multiculturalism', provides a rough definition to help guide analysis. It can be argued that multiculturalism in the UK is rooted in the early Seventeenth Century and the birth and expansion of the British Empire. Much of this can be perceived in the literary works of Shakespear and Walter Scot. The end of the British Empire and the process of Decolonisation has led to a shift in the nature/demographic construction of the population of the UK.

Identity is a dynamic concept. Multiculturalism sees identity as static and fixed within group boundaries. In many cases these have become as 'essentialist' as the old ideas about racial difference. They have – possibly inadvertently – promoted separatist notions of superiority, rather than breaking down boundaries and recognising our common humanity. The reality for many people today, however, is that identity is more fluid and even transitory. To a large extent, identity can now be regarded as chosen, rather than given. The growth of mixed race, intermarriage across national, faith and other boundaries now means that there is a lot of support for the notion that 'You can't put me in a box', as Fanshawe and Sriskandarajah explain:

"In an age of super diversity where people do not identify around single identities and feel conflicted allegiance (if any allegiance at all) to pre-defined groups, activism around particular 'strands' seems irrelevant to many people and may not even be that effective in addressing the true causes of inequality. Even the very categorisations that we rely on (For

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example, 'black', 'gay', 'Asian' or 'disabled') no longer seem to be able to tell us much about who a people is, what lives they lead, who they identify with, or what services they need from government and society. The tick box approach seems to be missing out on growing numbers of people who fall outside or across standard classifications. Yet society seems to treat ethnic identities as if they are clearly bounded, static and meaningful, and public bodies insist on a tick box classification."

"Culture" is an umbrella term which encompasses the social behaviour, institutions, and norms found in human societies, as well as the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities, and habits of the individuals in these groups. It also means to grow something - a plant for example.

Now, we culture new society in an ongoing process, as the material World changes on an almost daily basis. We have to adapt to this as we all move forward and, as we do, a new society develops around us. Will it still be multicultural? How can we work to be tolerant and inclusive of all, yet still remain a multicultural society? These are the dynamics we tackle at NWAMI as we seek to engage communities in a range of talks and social interactions, festivals and events celebrating the talents and the variety of approaches contained within our already diverse communities.

NWAMI - Networking for World Awareness of Multicultural Integration - takes a proactive position with respect to our collective way forward. We see mutual respect and understanding as crucial, we promote collaborative projects to explore new social and artistic avenues and seek to engage communities in open and positive conversations and debate. Crucially, our aim is to maintain a fluid dynamic where awareness and understanding of diverse ethnicities, origins and faiths contributes in a positive manner to the outcomes we develop. Humanity is core to this - <u>without people there is no culture!</u>

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One of the many positive outcomes of our work, we feel, is to enable the people who we encounter and who in any way engage with us, to reassess certain of their ideas, possibly opening new perspectives from which they can view society. This is a two way process, of course and the reciprocity here is fantastic. To open conversation is to remove barriers and to collaborate is to build connections which last when the project ends. Within such activities lie permanent changes, albeit often subtle, which lay down ever stronger foundations to the new milieu emerging.

Rome, they say, was not built in a day - in fact, at first, it was just two very young boys and a wolf! Similarly, we realise that many of the institutionalised problems of the social system we seek to move from, many of these still remain as strong shapers of behaviour and thought within many sectors. Some individuals don’t see any problem, some have not the scope to change. Peer group pressures can compound such situations. Within our organisation, we clearly look to remove all possibility of any such situation arising and, when encountered externally, we wholeheartedly encourage individuals meeting this to talk with us to develop a solution rather than engaging in confrontation.

References

Simon Fanshawe & Danny Sriskandarajah (2010) You Can't Put Me In A Box: Super-diversity and the end of identity politics in Britain, Institute for Public Policy Research