

## Culture

Ciaran Oglesby speaks to Lubja Moore and David Lynch of the Clondalkin Intercultural Centre

CO: Welcome, David. Could you tell us about the Centre?

DL: Well, The Centre itself grew up out of a need that really arose in the area in relation to a couple of things really. Clondalkin Partnership had been working, if you like, with ethnic minority groups in the Clondalkin and Lucan area for a number of years and there had been increasing numbers. And we felt that first of all we needed a space that would allow us to have activities that would help, first of all, to integrate ethnic minorities into the Irish community. Also one that would bring Irish people and ethnic minority people together to learn from each other through different kinds of activities and we felt that we had been dealing with groups, we have an ethnic minority women's forum in the area and that had been going for a number of years, but we felt that we needed a space because the work had grown so big we needed a space in which to concentrate the activities and also to be a focus for interculturalism and integration in the Clondalkin and Lucan areas. Basically because of that we identified that need over a number of years work and we identified a space here in Clondalkin Village that's right in the centre of the village, that's ideally located close to services here where you would have a lot of people coming with a lot of passing trade, a lot of people pass by, a lot of people notice it and know it. The fact that it's close to the services of people that are coming in for their social welfare, for FAS, for local Garda Station they will see the Intercultural Centre and a lot people come in, just the people that are passing by. So we were very fortunate I suppose we found the area or we found the building and we have set it up and it's been open really, where we acquired funding for the programme which is very important and we opened it to the public in March of this year so it's really been running from March until now. It's been going very well I have to say.

CO: What was the original intention and aim behind the Centre?

DL: Well the Centre, as I said, it's really kind of three things. There is unfortunately a lot of discrimination a lot of misunderstandings between different cultural groups and sometimes it's not actually based on racism sometimes it's based on fear and ignorance. We wanted the Centre to be a place to bring Irish people and immigrant communities together to see what they had in common but also for people to appreciate the differences and the diversity which enriches society. This was the idea that we would build activities around that. That was a major aim. Another one was building the capacity of the immigrant community to better integrate into Irish society, to be able to get access to jobs, training and services, to just feel part of a community, and we felt we needed to build people's capacity to do that and to provide then with information as well. It was to be an information point for people and there was one other aim, we wanted as well to be able to influence the services in the area, the community groups, when they are delivering their services they need to be more culturally sensitive to the fact that you are not delivering services to just to one homogeneous group of people but you're actually delivering services to different kinds of groups. We would hope that we have done a little bit of work with community groups but we want to do more work with different groups in the

community, teachers, health care practitioners, even the Gardai so that they are more aware of the different clients that they have and be able to take account of them when they are delivering their services. I think it was those 3 elements really that are the core of what the Centre is trying to do.

CO: To a large degree you provide a platform for disparate cultures and migrants in this country?

DL: That's right. I certainly feel that we wanted to be a space where people feel comfortable. We wanted a warm space and I think it is. People would feel welcome to come in both from the immigrant community and from the Irish community. That was very important for us in terms of how we set it up. We wanted people to feel a sense of ownership of it too so that they would feel "this is our space" both immigrant and Irish people. We also have computers here for people to use, to get information from the internet or whatever about accessing jobs. I think they would feel a sense that it's their space. We have been working on that and it's been going quite well.

CO: Well done! You were one of the first centres in the country. Do you think there should be more centres? Is there a need for them?

DL: Absolutely! I think it's a big issue. I will be honest with you I don't think at government level it's recognised to the degree it should be, the need for centres like this and the work that they do. Even with our centre, it's a pilot programme. We will be looking for more funding to try and make it a permanent fixture in the life of this area. I know other centres have the same issues but getting that core funding means that there needs to be a recognition at government level of the need for centres like this. I think as more centres are setting up and doing more and more good work and activities we are proving the need for them. Hopefully, in the future there will be more resources put into centres like this. We certainly would like to be a good model and a lot of other centres have very good models of practice and have built up a lot of very good work in the area of integration and interculturalism. I would very much hope that the government and the new Ministry of Integration will take note of the work that's being done.

LM: I would like to add that if there is no space for people there wouldn't be any dialogue. You need a space for people to meet, the Irish community and new communities.

CO: Luba, could you tell us about the projects you have already and are currently undertaking?

LM: Well, David has just mentioned the three main areas of work of the centre. I will just go into details of actual activities. So we run English classes mostly on the beginners' level. There are morning classes, evening classes and a conversation club so that we can meet all the needs in terms of time and in terms of the level of the students. We also want to attract more Irish people into the centre for that reason we organise other language classes and they are mostly done by volunteers so we invite volunteers into the centre to teach a small group of Irish people or others if the language is Spanish, Arabic or Russian if they are interested in it. The next main activity in the centre is an after-school club. We all know that there is a real need for

after-school clubs so we are doing one project with the Partnership and it's an after-school club in drama and film making in partnership with Aras Cronam. It's the Irish cultural group here. It will be a really amazing project with over 100 students with a number of second-level students. We have just started ballet classes for small kids between 5 and 8 years of age and it's been great. While the girls and boys are learning ballet we are trying to engage parents, mothers mostly into some arts and crafts activities. We just had last week hair-braiding. One of our African volunteers was teaching hair-braiding. We are inviting local communities, ethnic and Irish, common interest communities to register with us and use the space here for their meetings. We also organise various events like the upcoming event is The Intercultural Sports Day and we are doing it in partnership with SARI (Sports against Racism in Ireland). 3 schools are going to be involved on the 19<sup>th</sup> November. The next big activity which I am really looking forward to is because there will be really great musicians there, and again it's in partnership with Aras Cronam, are Irish music sessions every Friday and we are going to incorporate other music from different cultures into it. I think it will be really great. Our big plan is to have an Intercultural Film Club. We are really close to that. We are doing it in partnership with Aras Cronam. The project would involve 2 venues, Aras Cronam for big viewings and smaller members' viewings and discussions here in our training room. We are considering having 2 membership clubs, 1 adult and 1 youth, International and Intercultural film clubs. I really believe that film can introduce other cultures to the Irish population.

CO: That's great, those are very interesting projects. You seem to be hitting the areas and subjects which people really relate to in their everyday life and will do outside of work. Could you explain to us a bit more about the after-school clubs? I'm not aware of them.

LM: The after-school clubs target is integration. So we want to bring Irish kids and non-Irish kids together in an informal atmosphere after school where they can create something together. The creation of something together brings people together.

CO: That's wonderful. What has the public's reaction been like to your centre and the projects you have undertaken?

LM: We are getting so big recently. We have so many activities. One group is leaving the premises and another group is arriving so I think that answers your question.

CO: Finally for both of you. Do you feel that there is a healthy level of Intercultural dialogue in Ireland today?

LM: Well I think that it's healthy and better than it was but still there is a long way ahead and that is why Centre's like this are so important to provide a space for that dialogue.

DL: Yeah, I agree, I think things have improved but I think our experience has been that a lot of activities to encourage integration have to be planned a lot of times. They don't tend to happen even within schools you find that kids, ok there is a certain amount of mixture, but there is also a certain amount of kids from different ethnic cultures separating off. I think it's up to centres like ourselves and community groups, I'm not saying it's just centres like ourselves, its all community activity, should be

focused on integration and bringing people together. You have to work at it. It's something that has to be organised and made to happen. The aim would be over time that Intercultural dialogue would improve and increase particularly where you work with kids you hope then that the positive attitudes they have as kids will carry on with them as adults. We won't fall into situations where ghettoisation and segregation, which has happened in a lot of other western countries in relation to minority cultures and majority cultures. We want to avoid that and in Ireland at the moment we still have a situation where we can change things, where we can make a difference. This type of activity has to be encouraged and resourced for it to happen. I would be very hopeful for the future in a lot of respects. We are getting a very good reaction. These kinds of centres have long-term plans. The benefits of the centre's activities would have a long term impact in the communities of Clondalkin, Lucan and surrounding areas.

LM: I would like to add one more thing. The main purpose of the Intercultural Centre is to bring Irish people into them. The name Intercultural Centre may be a bit misleading. Some Irish people might think that it's for the new communities, but how can we integrate into Ireland if Irish people are not part of the centre? The main message is that it's for Irish people as well as for the new communities.

Vox Pop conducted by Ciaran Oglesby

OC: Do you think Intercultural gatherings serve as effective places to facilitate Intercultural Dialogue?

VP1: Yes it does. Definitely! It is through human interaction that you get to know. Where there is no interaction, you never know. Reading books it's not something you can learn immediately. You have to learn about people from going into their countries and experience it for yourself. That is the best way.

VP2: Yes, absolutely! It is the best place where you can socialise, meet people and be happy with them.

VP3: I do. I think this is fantastic with all the different cultures here. I'm not sure if this it assists dialogue but it links things all together and makes everyone more aware. It's good.

Ciaran Oglesby speaks to Grainne Miller Director of Culture Night

CO: Grainne, Is there much of an Intercultural presence visible in Ireland today?

GM: Well certainly now from my experience here in Dublin, I would say there is a huge Intercultural experience. You just have to look at things like the Chinese New Year's Festival which is really kicking off this year, The Festival of World Cultures which has been around for nearly 8 or 9 years. It just seems to be growing massively. It is one of the most successful festivals in all of Ireland. Around Temple Bar for example, where I work, the Project Arts centre would frequently have stage plays by Polish writers or exhibitions from the Polish community. The Irish Film Institute would regularly hold seasons of films whether its Bollywood films to directors from Eastern Europe. There's is definitely a very strong presence of Intercultural activity

happening in the cultural venues and I think that's really reflected in the audiences, just the physical numbers, particularly in Dublin, of people living here from different countries.

CO: Has the European culture influenced Irish culture and vice-versa?

GM: Well I would say, no doubt it has. Given our own background of emigration and the Irish love of travel and going to different places, you can't deny the influences of the different places that you see. In visual arts, many of our contemporary painters spent quite a considerable amount of time overseas. Whether that's because of the climate or the light but there's definitely a stimulus you would get from living in a different country and being exposed to different cultures to different experiences. I mean look at our writers, the great James Joyce spent all of his life outside of Ireland and equally I would say the number of different cultural communities now living here in Dublin and throughout Ireland is absolutely having a huge influence. You can see that even in television where different issues are coming up like television programmes feature more mixed marriages. I think it's healthy and it's natural that you would have a meeting of different minds and perhaps there could be more opportunities for people to come together. This Euro-culture festival which took place in Smithfield this summer and, I think it was its third year, which was a celebration of European cultures and was hugely attended by a huge number of people from Dublin and other countries as well. I think that's going to be the key for the future of somewhere like Dublin looking at how cultural activity can promote a greater sense of understanding between different cultures and it can actually bring people together. I think it's probably the one area that transforms things like politics and other barriers that prevent from sharing experiences. I think that culture can help, and arts experiences can help to bring different communities together and they don't necessarily have to be from other countries. It can help to understand the issues affecting the smaller communities here in Ireland whether it's the Travelling population or the Irish language which is its own culture outside of the dominant English tradition, there is much to learn.

CO: Are there many European artists practicing their craft or based in Ireland and what in your experience has attracted them here?

GM: Well I wouldn't have an exact figure of the numbers that are here but certainly when you look around at the diversity of performances happening. If you think about the International Dance Festival some of the venues I mentioned already like The Project Arts Centre even The Abbey Theatre and The National Concert Hall, they would regularly have artists and performers from different countries. On radio for instance there is a lot more attention given to multicultural activities so there's definitely an increase but perhaps given the challenging times ahead in terms of finance, to what the support that can be given to individual artists to make a living here is going to be a challenge. It's difficult enough for Irish artists so in terms of the visual artists, the needs they have in terms of studio space is a challenge. The cost of locating in a city is quite expensive so it will be interesting to see how this plays out in the next number of years.

CO: The contemporary influx of migration we have experienced has been unprecedented in recent history. Have you found that the migrants have a platform or

have found a platform for exhibiting or expressing their culture here in Ireland and is it gelling or intermixing with Irish culture or influencing it in any way?

GM: Yeah, I think it's an interesting question because just a few weeks ago we had organised with the Temple Bar Cultural Trust a conference on the theme of culture in the city and that point came up about having a space like a community hall or a town hall I suppose where different communities would have a chance to present their work or fulfil their own creative ambitions and on the one hand there is a feeling that perhaps in a city, for instance like Dublin, particularly for community groups and different multicultural groups, space is limited to give groups like this a chance to express their own cultures. There is work being done through the City Council, for instance they have a multicultural officer who would liaise very successfully with the various different cultural constituents. In Dublin for instance on Culture Night we extend an invitation to a huge number of cultural communities, African to Polish and Eastern Europeans to present their work in and around the public spaces of Temple Bar in Dublin. That was extremely successful. I think that there is an issue around space and affordability of space. There is a lack of a dedicated centre within different communities. You can be very resourceful and people will find places to show their work but I think a little bit more work needs to be done to give greater visibility to the multicultural communities here and also to provide opportunities to Irish people to engage more. I think for instance it's not necessarily directly related to Arts however around the time of the Special Olympics we remember villages around Ireland hosting communities from around the world. The success of that and the legacy it has left and the understanding it has generated between the Irish people and the different communities who were spending time there. Probably more work needs to be done opening up these opportunities but you have to respect at the same time the wishes of the various communities living here in terms of what they want and what terms they would want to engage with other communities as well. The Chinese community, the Polish are very strong tight knit communities with a great sense of their own culture and I think it's really important that that's respected.

CO: Historically, has there been a network of cultural exchanges between Ireland and the rest of Europe?

GM: Well informally the Irish have been great travellers and many of our great artists and writers have spent much time overseas. Over the last number of years there have been more formal structures. For instance here in Temple Bar, Temple Bar Gallery and Studios for instance would run exchange programmes with places like the artists studios in Finland. In work that I have done previously in Monaghan, I have been working in a residential arts centre called the Tyrone Guthrie Centre, very remote in location, it was very actively involved in artistic exchange everywhere from Australia to America to Eastern Europe. I would say that probably there is scope for more of it, that there would be a very high degree of it already taking place.

CO: Finally Grainne, How much has subculture affected or even influenced mainstream culture in Ireland today?

GM: Well I suppose looking at the use of new media and digital technology we all know the impact the internet has had on the music industry and on CD sales. You are finding that, and this is something that will really take over in times to come, but how

younger people are engaging with culture and consuming culture is very different to my generation or past generations.

CO: It's a lot more accessible to them...

GM: It's a lot more accessible but it's also a lot more on their terms. I think that young people are choosing when they consume culture, how they want to engage with it and there are more opportunities for them to be creatively involved. I think we really have to look at that and the cultural sector in general has to look at that. In terms of new younger audiences coming up, the traditional going to the theatre at 8pm, the concert hall at 8pm. I think it's all going to change. I was just reading today that RTE are investing something like E111,000,000 in digitisation of television. It is part of the new knowledge economy and creative economy we are moving into which I think is going to have a dramatic impact on how culture is consumed and accessed.

CO: To a large degree you would have young people who wouldn't have an opportunity to travel or go to college to experience foreign cultures and they can do it readily now in their bedroom via the internet.

GM: They do it easily at home, have a full cultural experience. I think that's got to be the challenge is how if you're running festivals or venues are running events how are you going to persuade people to leave the confines of their comfortable, cosy armchair and computer screen and come out and participate in events. I think it's going to be a big challenge to the cultural sector.