10 Consultation and ethnic communities

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Introduction

In recent years, governments have increasingly recognised the need to ensure that the decisions they make reflect the concerns of the people affected by their policies. Consultation and participation have become key ideas in much of the rhetoric of public policy. These ideas first emerged in the 1960s in response to a range of perceptions including the views that public authorities were becoming increasingly centralised; that they were indifferent to local concerns; and that they acted more for business interests than in the interests of the people. The opposition to these trends came in the form of political campaigns designed to force governments to consult more widely and to establish mechanisms that gave communities a real say in the processes of decision making. Social movements formed around women, lesbians and gays, indigeneous people and people with disabilities and from ethnic communities demanded a participative role in decisions that affected their lives. The commitment to consultation which most governments now espouse has arguably resulted from the combined political efforts of these movements.

In Australia, one of the earliest expressions of state support for the idea of consultation came in 1973 with the introduction of the Australian Assistance Plan (AAP)—a regional development program aimed at involving local people in decision making about issues that affected them. A few years later, it was the Galbally Report (Review of Post Arrival Programs and Services for Migrants 1978) that became the first major federal government document to highlight the

importance of consultation with non-English speaking background (NESB) communities. The National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia (1989) has continued the tradition, similarly stressing the importance of consultation.

The idea of consultation in one form or another has now become institutionalised. Its most recent expression has been in the federal government's Access and Equity Strategy designed to ensure that public programs and services are properly developed and equitably distributed. In a report completed for the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) evaluating the impact of the Access and Equity Strategy for NESB people, Jupp (1993, p. 4) has noted that consultation is a central component of the Strategy. He has suggested that:

> . . . regular consultation with the clientele is part of the strategy both to identify barriers and problems and to give the clientele the influence in shaping programs appropriately.

Jupp (1993, p. 5) maintains that the Strategy 'goes beyond formal democracy to embrace concepts of consultation and participation which have become acceptable dimensions of democracy only in the past two decades'.

While there is now a large body of literature describing the role of consultation in the development of public policies, little has been written about how consultation might contribute to the formulation of arts and cultural policies. In this chapter, I will explore some of the ways government and non-government institutions might engage with NESB artists and communities in developing arts and cultural policies and practices consistent with the principles of multiculturalism. Beginning with a brief discussion of the meaning of consultation, I will describe the various forms that consultation can take in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies. I will argue that the widest possible consultation is essential for the achievement of a more inclusive arts policy for a multicultural Australia.

On the basis of the experience I have had with ethnic communities, I will outline the various concerns that NESB artists and communities in Australia have about the consultative processes that have been tried over the past two decades. Exploring a range of issues that arise specifically in the arts area, I will suggest some possible strategies that could be developed to ensure a more effective dialogue with ethnic communities. I will argue that effective consultation requires a process of ongoing negotiation at each of the stages of policy development, implementation and evaluation. Unless such a process is established, NESB artists will continue to occupy a marginal position in the development of an Australian identity and culture. Further, I will contend that our identity as a nation can only be vibrant and dynamic if all Australians are able to participate in

the production of the arts and culture which symbolically represent who we are as a nation. In my view, this implies a principle of inclusivity that is critical to the processes of negotiating a new Australian identity, as we move towards redefining the arts and cultural expressions that are projected symbolically as Australian.

What is consultation?

The word consultation does not have a single universal meaning. It has many and varied meanings. Much depends on who is using the term, in what context and for what purpose. At the most general level, the idea of consultation suggests processes of deliberation in which information or advice is sought from people thought to have some special expertise or interest in the area. It also refers to a particular stage in policy process at which clients are given an opportunity to provide feedback on options being considered.

A major problem with this definition is that it reduces consultation to be merely a technical matter, largely divorced from the issues of politics and the mobilisation of power. A political definition of consultation, on the other hand, raises questions about who makes the decisions and what power various participants have over the processes of deliberation and their outcomes. Who sets the agenda for the consultation? Who is consulted? How does the information gathered affect the outcomes of the consultation? And how are the decisions eventually communicated to the communities and implemented?

As Kazan (1988) has argued, 'perhaps the most sophisticated definitions (of consultation) are those which do not attempt to talk in terms of mechanisms but rather focus on the political impact of consultation'. She views consultation as a political philosophy which recognises that citizens have a right to be involved in certain decisions made by the government. Kazan suggests that:

> . . . the essential point is that it is fruitless to set up a definition of 'ideal' consultation which can be used as a yard stick to measure success or failure. Like all political philosophies the term itself is value-laden. Consultation techniques need to be subservient to the particular political goal sought to be achieved in each consultation. (Kazan, 1988, p. 3)

This notion of consultation is thus linked to a political goal—the goal of participation. Consultation is a process for enabling participation in decision making. It is a tool to bring about participation and can be considered as only one aspect of participation.

Sandercock (1986) has also pointed out that the technical concept

of participation is most often seen as a way of securing reliable feedback from clients in the form of useful advice and suggestions, usually about questions of detail rather that questions of policy. This is prevalent in Australian public authorities and is based on the rationale of bureaucratic efficiency. By contrast, she argues, a political view of participation involves seeing:

> . . . the citizen not as the beneficiary (or victim) of 'welfare colonialism' but as a policy maker, voting member of a governing board. This view can be seen as cynical or realistic depending on one's beliefs about the efficacy, genuineness and effectiveness of consultation goals and processes. (Sandercock, 1986, p. 7)

Consultation with NESB communities

In Australia, while NESB communities have been widely consulted about the development of migration and ethnic welfare policies, often through Ethnic Communities Councils and the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA), they have not generally been involved in the formulation and evaluation of arts policies. It is often assumed that arts policies and programs are applicable uniformly to all artists in the same way: that everyone has equal access to the production and consumption of the arts. But, as many NESB artists have pointed out, programs are not uniformly delivered because they favour particular traditions and because they rest on particular cultural assumptions. Nor do all Australians have the same opportunity to produce and consume the arts in the same way. To treat everyone in the same way is to overlook the real differences that exist in language, cultural perceptions and understanding of the ways of 'doing business' with bureaucracies. Many NESB artists have suggested that, paradoxical though it may seem, it is these so-called egalitarian values, viewed narrowly in terms of access, that often represent the most serious obstacles and barriers to their participation in Australian cultural life. They argue that genuine equality requires policies that are grounded in a historically sensitive understanding of cultural differences.

Many arts administrators still fail to see how genuine equality does not only involve access, but might also require affirmative action. Many in the field even regard affirmative action as some kind of special treatment, unfair to the majority. A recent example may serve to illustrate the confusions that persist in some sections of the arts community concerning the issues of access and equity and multiculturalism. It concerns a response to the South Australian Department for the Arts and Cultural Heritage's Multiculturalism in the Arts Strategy, written by a number of arts administrators who

wished to remain anonymous, and published in the *Adelaide Advertiser* (3 June 1993). Their letter to the Editor suggested that:

> . . . arts funding in Australia . . . [is] dominated by debate over arm's length funding . . . funding that comes without political interference and enables arts companies to pursue truth and beauty unencumbered by anyone's political baggage . . . [yet] . . . the South Australian Department for the Arts and Cultural Heritage is trying to force a policy [of multiculturalism] developed by bureaucracy down the throats of all arts groups on pain of excommunication or no funding . . . for the arts to flourish it must be unhindered and to force socially progressive policies upon it is almost as dangerous as forcing reactionary or discriminatory policies upon it . . . if they want companies to promote multiculturalism they should fund companies to do that . . . we have such a huge push on for Australian content . . . what's to be the biggest emphasis.

The letter involves a number of confusions. It assumes, for example, that multiculturalism addresses issues that are somehow unrelated to the emphasis on Australian content. It also assumes social and cultural policies to be entirely separable from policies designed to provide NESB artists greater access to funding. The claim that the arts are concerned with pursuing truth and beauty unencumbered by 'anyone's political baggage' is reasonable enough, but it obscures the fact that all funding decisions are made against a preferred set of selection criteria. Furthermore, the letter assumes multiculturalism to be an 'add-on' marginal issue that is being forced upon the 'mainstream'. What it fails to acknowledge is that the mainstream in arts is itself a dynamic phenomenon, which is increasingly prepared to engage with the issues of cultural diversity in Australia.

The letter is indicative of a pattern of resistance to the idea of multiculturalism that persists in much of the arts community. This resistance is partly based on a number of mistaken beliefs: that multiculturalism compromises artistic integrity; that it is inimical to the notion of artistic excellence; and that it amounts to some form of 'social engineering'. But it is also based on a lack of knowledge and understanding about the artistic energies that exist in the ethnic communities in Australia.

Furthermore, there appears to be considerable reluctance within some arts and cultural organisations to debate about the wider Australian cultural context within which both multiculturalism and the arts feature as inextricably linked. Policy-makers and program administrators committed to multiculturalism need to understand this culture of resistance, and locate their activities within a political context that is at best ambivalent towards cultural diversity. In such a context, consultation with NESB communities is crucial. Apart

from the fact that it can be justified in the strongest possible moral and political terms, it can also be viewed as a key pragmatic strategy in promoting greater understanding of the issues. As Perlgut (1991) maintains, consultation can be justified in pragmatic terms since 'support for programs and policies often depends on people's willingness to assist the process'. This point is particularly pertinent to the arts since to flourish they require wide-ranging community support, which cannot be achieved without meaningful links through effective consultation with communities as well as artists.

Further arguments in favour of consultation with ethnic communities relate more directly to the nature of the arts themselves and their contribution to current debates surrounding the development of Australian national identity. For it is being increasingly acknowledged that the harnessing and reflecting of all Australia's cultural resources is essential not only to the development of Australian identity but also to the fostering of dynamism and growth in our arts and cultural industries. Excluding 30 per cent of the population from the process would render Australia paralysed in the face of dynamism; unable to take up the challenge of growth through that diversity.

Harnessing all the creative contributions of Australia can only enrich and deepen our experience of cultural life and lead to a development of the arts which is uniquely and inclusively Australian. Australia's international relations with regard to the arts would be greatly enhanced and assisted by making links with NESB communities who have enormous skill resources, such as language skills, familiarity with their countries of origin and their ways of doing business, overseas networks and knowledge, and so on. The international movement of people is on a scale unprecedented in history. To not make use of the resources provided by the ethnic communities would only stunt the development of our cultural life. Their exclusion, whether by default or otherwise, would see Australia in a world context, as a nation unable to come to terms with itself.

While in terms of state policies, the arts have found it difficult to achieve a high priority in the past, there is some evidence to indicate that governments and the Australian community at large are increasingly recognising the importance of the arts in the creation of the cultural symbols by which we live. Yet, in the climate of economic difficulties which the nation faces, governments are reluctant to invest in the arts, leaving the task of cultural formations to popular forms of the cultural industry, more interested in making high returns on investment than in exploring new ideas. Television, blockbuster movies and sophisticated entertainment technology are now whetting the appetites of audiences for completely different cultural experiences from those offered by the arts.

Yet, we know that it has been the arts that have been at the cutting edge of change in society throughout history. They have provided new ideas, new ways of thinking,-new symbols and images and new visions for the world. However, in an age where values have changed to accommodate the senses that delight in the fast, the big, the highly technological, memory is short-lived. Concentration on the depth that is entailed in the appreciation of live arts is lost to an increasing majority of people whose aesthetics do not match their daily experiences of cultural life. From the point of view of NESB communities, this trend is disturbing because they are less likely to be represented in the popular forms of entertainment—the blockbusters. Their images are rarely seen on the screen or the stage; their voices are rarely heard on radio except on ethno-specific radio. They are rendered invisible and unable to be heard by an Anglo-dominated and controlled cultural industry.

There is an increasing political awareness and activism within NESB communities around the principle of inclusivity. They are beginning to view the arts as a major vehicle for cultural changes which they hope the populist cultural industries will eventually accept and adopt. Many in the ethnic communities see considerable potential in a partnership between themselves and the arts organisations. For ethnic communities can provide a powerful lobby for the arts, while the arts can contribute to the development of a multicultural society which is more inclusive of diverse cultural traditions.

Ethnic communities have proven to be powerful lobbyists. Their sheer numbers, in terms of the vote, cannot be ignored. This was amply demonstrated at the March 1993 federal elections, despite suggestions that the 'ethnic vote' was dead. It is also true, however, that until recently the arts and cultural life have not been the focus of political lobbying by NESB communities. Indeed, this was highlighted recently when a small but highly significant cultural grants program in a State ethnic affairs organisation was abolished without the normal opposition that we have come to expect from the ethnic communities. Peak ethnic advocacy bodies, with some notable exceptions, had little time, the resources or the political inclination to focus on the needs of NESB artists. The arts had often been assumed to be the 'icing on the cake' by many activists who were understandably more concerned about the 'survival' needs of their communities. Given limited resources, they had argued that they first had to attend to such issues as health, housing, education, legal issues, child care, immigration and racism before they could seriously consider arts and its place in Australian cultural life. This should not, however, detract from the fact that community cultural life within the ethnic communities has been very rich in Australia. Great sacrifice, expense and activity have gone into establishing numerous ethno-specific cultural

organisations. But the primary purpose of these organisations has been the maintenance of cultural traditions as well as providing opportunities for their communities to socialise and enjoy traditional cultural activities, rather than the promotion of creativity in the arts.

In recent years, however, most ethnic communities have recognised the importance of their representation in all spheres of Australian life. They have noted a lack of equal and positive representation in the media and arts and cultural practices, giving credence to their view that exclusionary policies and practices still operate to maintain dominant Anglo-Australian power. For thousands of NESB people, *Wogs out of Work* (whatever one's ideas about its aesthetic values) demonstrated a hunger to see themselves represented in the public domain. It, together with a number of other productions, led to a politicisation of some sections of the NESB communities regarding the arts.

Increasingly, NESB actors have been making their voice heard about the discrimination that they experience through stereotypical casting. This has become such a major issue that actors and community groups from non-English speaking backgrounds have begun to organise their own theatre activities and establish their own companies. Such has been the impact of these developments that the Multicultural Theatre Alliance (MTA) in Sydney, for example, after just three years, is holding festivals on mainstream stages and in other venues on an annual basis. Many NESB theatre workers now believe that they are redefining the mainstream. The plays written and performed by NESB artists reflect ethnic community issues; and since they are presented bilingually in some instances they serve to touch cords in the communities, creating an interest in the arts that many NESB people had previously been unable to express. As well, much of this work has been 'cutting edge' and of such 'excellent' quality that there is now added pressure on the mainstream to take ethnic issues seriously. Examples include *Diablo*, *Keep Him My Heart* and *Ricordi*. The bilingual Italian theatre company, Doppio Teatro's use of English dialogue spoken to the rhythms of Italian dialects has served to create the possibilities of a distinctly Australian style. Doppio's popularity in the international arena is testament to its excellence.

This increased political awareness and activity within NESB artists and communities has also led to the formation of formal advocacy networks designed to explore issues of political strategy. There is now some evidence that this advocacy is having its desired effects. The 1988 Arts for a Multicultural Australia Conference in Adelaide was the first major public forum on the arts and multiculturalism. The Conference represented a conglomerate of diverse views. Subsequently, the National Arts for a Multicultural Australia

Network (NAMAN) and similar State networks have been formed. As well, the national peak body for ethnic communities, FECCA, has developed its own Arts Network, collaborating with NAMAN. The focus of these initiatives is on the creation of mechanisms for formal and informal dialogue so that the mainstream arts organisations can be presented with an effective political voice.

The arts and cultural organisations can no longer afford to ignore this voice. They need to address the barriers that NESB artists continue to face in order to be able to participate fully in Australian cultural life. Beyond this issue of access, they need to ensure that NESB communities are able to participate in setting the agenda and determining policies in relation to Australian cultural development. But how might they do this?

Issues of Consultation

Consultation is critical to this process. For arts and cultural organisations it is important that the consultation be regular and culturally appropriate, and that agendas and objectives for meetings be mutually agreed. Such meetings should seek to identify the various issues that confront NESB artists, both in their work as individual artists and in the development of theatre companies, dance troupes and the like. Arts and cultural organisations also need to identify the cultural needs of the communities. Some of these needs relate to funding and the production of the arts, while others concern community participation in the consumption of the arts. Non-English speaking communities should be able to feel that their cultural values and traditions are acknowledged, and that they have a role to play in the development of an Australian identity. For many ethnic communities arts and culture have historically been integral to their lives. Acknowledging this fact and negotiating how their traditions can be supported in Australia is essential for establishing a productive working relationship with NESB artists and ethnic organisations.

In seeking to achieve these objectives, arts and cultural organisations confront a number of issues, some of which apply to all attempts at consultation, while others are specific to NESB artists and communities. Generally speaking, community and client demands for consultation are for openness, accountability and respect for their democratic rights as citizens. For arts organisations, on the other hand, consultation is more of an administrative requirement—about finding out what the communities think about something before any final decisions are taken. Consultation is designed to increase efficiency and gather information. Within the framework of these competing expectations, it is the organisations who usually

control the agenda. How it might be possible to develop a more symmetrical power relation is an issue that lies at the heart of the politics of consultation.

Consultation is a process about making choices. Whether these choices are about operational matters or about fundamental policy decisions is critical. Often there is confusion over what the consultation is seeking to achieve, leading to expectations that cannot be realised. It is important therefore to be clear about the nature, purpose and scope of consultation—whether it is exploratory, or it is designed to resolve issues of conflict, or it is about gathering information, or about considering policy options, or about making a final decision about a policy, or about evaluating a program that has already been put into place.

A major problem in consultation with NESB artists and communities has been that those given responsibility for consultation have often not been able to deal with cultural diversity and difference. Communication difficulties, cultural differences, political differences, lack of familiarity with Australian systems, differences of opinion about specific arts and cultural issues both within communities and between communities, geographical isolation, lack of sympathy by staff or organisational representatives and lack of organisational initiatives in reaching out to potential clients have all contributed to disappointment and frustration.

Arts and cultural organisations need to take account of the fact that NESB artists and communities are often not well resourced—in time, administrative expertise or money—to make their voice heard effectively. Much of the support needed for effective consultation therefore has to be provided by the arts organisations themselves. The amount of support various ethnic communities need varies. Some are reasonably well organised, while others have to be convinced that consultation is in fact in their best interests. The diversity is enormous. Also, it is just as well to remember that there are 112 different non-indigenous language groups in Australia, each representing their unique set of traditions and histories.

Arts and cultural organisations also have to overcome the difficulties associated with the cynicism that can be found in many NESB artists and communities. This cynicism has a variety of causes. Many have never been consulted before and are therefore suspicious of motives for consultation. For others, consultations in the past have reaped little or no benefit for them and have only been used as a window-dressing exercise to meet administrative requirements. Consultation has thus been viewed as tokenistic. In some cases, consultations has even resulted in 'efficiency and effectiveness' exercises designed to justify reduced services. Combating such instances of understandable cynicism requires communication skills that few

administrators possess, and training that few arts organisations seem willing to provide.

Much of the cynicism that NESB artists express relates to the inability of many arts administrators to come to terms with diverse traditions of aesthetic excellence in Australia. Despite the commitment of their organisations to the contrary, many administrators continue to use dualisms such as excellence and not-excellence, contemporary and traditional, professional and amateur to marginalise the arts produced by NESB artists. Many fail to explore the notion of multiculturalism for its broader potential, beyond the narrow focus of access and equity. The view that the multicultural, ethnic or non-English speaking background is concerned only with heritage and traditional arts remains persistent, as does the belief that 'if you're "excellent" you'll make it anyway'. Designation of artists who operate outside the largely Western tradition of the arts as amateur remains a major obstacle to the participation of NESB artists in Australian cultural life.

But even many of those administrators who do not articulate such views about the nature of the arts hold beliefs about the possibilities of consultation that make it difficult for them to engage in genuine consultative processes. Such beliefs include: 'we know what they think. We've heard it all before'; 'there are too many culturally and politically different artists and communities for all of them to be consulted'; 'consultation is too time-consuming and complicated'; 'it is too political—they can't agree among themselves'; 'it is too expensive'; 'it generates too much conflict and anger'; and 'consultation with NESB communities and artists is irrelevant to the development of the arts'.

Strategies of consultation

To overcome some of these difficulties, arts and cultural organisations need to be clear about the strategies they employ to ensure that consultation processes become as institutionalised as possible; that they are not entirely dependent on one or two well-meaning people, but are the responsibility of everyone working within the organisation; and that they are structured within its operational ethos. It has to be noted that arts and cultural organisations are not homogeneous: they contain people who hold a variety of conflicting views. Much work therefore needs to be done *within* organisations so that people working in them can adopt a reasonably consistent and coherent approach to consultation with ethnic communities.

In seeking to consult NESB artists and communities, arts organisations need to ensure that:

- the consultation objectives are clear and provide specific direction to the consultation process;
- the process of consultation is planned in such a way as to take into account the diversity and complexities of the NESB communities;
- the process is supported by adequate resources, including people experienced in working with NESB communities, financial resources and time to design and implement consultation processes;
- the artists and communities of non-English speaking background are provided with adequate support, including access to technical expertise, knowledge of 'the corridors of power', knowledge of financial arrangements, and knowledge of the 'industry' and the arts media;
- the timing is appropriate and realistic (i.e. NESB artists and communities are given sufficient time to engage with the issues);
- the information provided about issues is 'usable', written in an accessible language designed to open up an issue rather than close it around a predetermined decision;
- as part of the accountability process, the consultation processes and decisions are a matter for public record, not bureaucratic minutes filed and forgotten;
- the information gleaned from the different groups being consulted is shared with other groups as a way of providing opportunities for dialogue between the groups;
- the first generation NESB artists are provided with interpreters, as well as appropriate information through ethnic press and radio;
- the use of advocates or bilingual consultants is considered.

In developing a consultation strategy, the question arises as to who should be consulted. The existing ethnic organisations provide a convenient beginning point. Many ethnic communities are highly organised, with a range of groups—religious, sporting, cultural, welfare and educational. As well, ethnic communities unite on these matters through organisations such as the Ethnic Communities Councils, which exist in every state and territory of Australia, and a national Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils. These Councils are the official voice of ethnic communities and are elected by their communities in a highly organised manner, through contested elections.

Information about ethnic communities can also be found at Migrant Resource Centres which exist all around Australia and which operate through community-based management committees that are elected on an annual basis. Migrant Resource Centres are direct service organisations coming into contact with immigrants and

second-generation NESB people on a daily basis. Their networks are extensive and they are a very strong lobby group which is not afraid to exercise its political power. Both ethnic communities and Migrant Resource Centres make effective use of the ethnic media which boasts a collective audience of some four million people. Another source of information is the network of Multicultural Arts Officers, funded by the Australia Council, through its Community Cultural Development Board. Many of these officers are located within Ethnic Communities Councils and Migrant Resource Centres.

The final decision as to who should be consulted and how cannot, of course, be divorced from the purpose of consultation. Each consultation would depend on the considerations relevant to the purpose. Thus, for example, cross-ethnic or ethno-specific considerations may require different forms of consultation, as would issues related to the locality or the artform. Any assessment of the needs of the recently arrived immigrant artists requires a different consultation process still. Some issues are, moreover, of local and regional interest only, while others have statewide or even national significance.

Some other hints

It should be clear that there is no single best way of consulting. For consultation to be effective, the processes must match the consultation objectives. Whenever possible, both the purposes and the processes of consultation should be negotiated, for it is important that consultation be considered the responsibility of all parties. Without agreed commitment, consultation is unlikely to be useful. While no general rules are possible, those organising the consultation processes in the area of the arts may consider the following:

- Contact those in the field with a direct interest in the arts for a multicultural Australia, notably the multicultural arts organisations such as the Multicultural Arts Alliance, Queensland Multicultural Arts Network, the Multicultural Arts Centre of Western Australia; the Multicultural Arts Officers; as well as other arts organisations with a demonstrated commitment to multiculturalism. This is important in order to gain advice on the formal contacts in the ethnic communities.
- Write formally to these contacts following it up with a telephone call to arrange a meeting date, ensuring the meeting is formal and is regarded as a serious attempt to consult with the communities. It is important to establish a set of mutually agreed objectives and processes for the consultation as early as possible.

- Talk to the representatives of ethno-specific organisations with a view to expanding understanding of arts issues, both yours and theirs. This may require attending conferences and establishing on-going links with ethnic organisations.
- On more specific issues, hold public meetings, call for oral submissions, organise phone-ins and arrange workshops as a way of preparing submissions. In some cases, the issues may be of sufficient significance as to warrant the employment of consultants who can lead workshops. The office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) has developed an extensive network of bilingual consultants who can be employed to assist in the consultation process.
- Ethnic radio and press are critical tools for making contact with those artists and communities who would otherwise not be picked up in the rounds of the known arts and ethnic organisations.
- Provide NESB artists and communities with detailed information about how the organisation concerned functions; the services it provides; staffing levels including specialist staff with knowledge of multicultural issues and skills in languages other then English. What are the limitations of what it can offer?
- Receiving feedback from the artists and communities is important. It may be prudent for organisations to provide NESB artists and members of ethnic communities with opportunities to visit and meet staff, perhaps on open days. It may also be important for them to obtain from ethnic organisations their view on how the organisation should operate with respect to their clientele and multiculturalism in general.
- Consider institutionalising consultation processes. It may be useful for organisations to include in their agenda the formal organisational voice of ethnic communities in their state or territory, to ensure ongoing regular consultation.
- Consulting is a complex activity requiring skills as simple as listening and as difficult as interpreting. Consider organising training workshops on consultation with ethnic communities.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored a range of issues concerning the purposes and processes of consultation as they might relate to the work of arts and cultural organisations. I have suggested that the idea of consultation with NESB communities has now become institutionalised in Australia, but it is relatively new in the arts. At the same time, consultation may be even more important in the cultural field, because it is here that the symbols by which we live and define our collective identity are negotiated.

I have described the complexity of the consultation processes and provided brief guidelines and checklists for those organising consultation with NESB artists and communities. Clarity of purpose and commitment to the agreed processes are, in my view, the most basic ingredient of effective consultation. These should be negotiated as early as possible.

Government arts and cultural policies are often criticised for attempting social engineering. I believe that such a charge is made only by those who seek to privilege one set of criteria for arts development over another. A policy of arts for multicultural Australia is, on the other hand, based on an inclusive vision of diversity and equality in the production and consumption of the arts. To achieve such a vision, consultation cannot be considered as an optional administrative extra, but something that is central to the vision itself.

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